# METANARRATIVES OF CHANGE

## ANALYSIS OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNANCE APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPE

### EXPLORING THE RELEVANCE OF CULTURE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Kaidi Tamm

# Metanarratives of Change: Civil Society and Governance Approaches to Sustainable Development in Europe

## Exploring the Relevance of Culture for Sustainability

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Revised version of a thesis submitted in 2016 in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Social Sciences and defended on 23.03.2017 at the oral disputation in the Institute of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies at the Justus Liebig University Giessen, Germany.

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# ABSTRACT

Although the urgent need for change towards sustainable development has become a widely accepted development goal in the European Union since the early 1990s, the pace of change in practice does not seem to have kept up with the urgency in rhetoric. This study takes a closer look at the diversity behind the seeming consensus, identifies ways the chosen stakeholders understand and practice sustainable development, checks if the bold claim that sustainable development has been mainstreamed in Europe holds true and reflects on the role of the often neglected cultural aspects in development processes.

This qualitative, empirical and comparative study collected novel data and used constructivist grounded theory methodology to analyse sixteen case studies including Estonia, Germany, Portugal and the European Union from the governance sector, and the Global Ecovillage Network Europe, the Transition network and the Let's Do It! network member initiatives from each participating country, plus the networks themselves from the civil society sector. The focus was laid on the first 15 years of the 21st century. However an analytical overview of developments since the outset of the 20th century is made as well to make grounded statements about the development of the sustainability scene.

Grounded theory analysis enabled identifying the core themes and categories of each case capturing their essential attitudes and solutions for moving towards sustainable development. After contextualising the case study results in existing research, two overarching metanarratives of change emerged: the holistic "reintegrating turn" capturing the essence of the civil society approach and the reductionist "economising turn" metanarrative reflecting the central solutions of the governance level.

The core differences between the civil society and governance approaches to sustainable development boiled down to different interpretations of the role of humans and their relationship to the world. The metanarratives of change are invariables of many micro-, meso- and macronarratives about the role of humans, their relationship with nature and the changes that need to be made for humanity to survive the multiple crises.

Among the main stumbling stones impeding the rhetorically desired cross-sectoral cooperation is the often unquestioned dominance of the weak sustainability approach focusing on the macrolevel processes and tangible aspects of development. The case study results show that although often sidelined, the cultural aspects play a significant role in shaping development processes. In fact, it is suggested that the seeming exclusion of cultural aspects in the "economising turn" approach has facilitated continuing practices perpetuating social inequality and environmental destruction.

The main contributions of this study include articulating a grounded theory about the sustainable development situation in Europe among the stakeholders, debunking the myth of sustainable development being mainstreamed in Europe, showcasing the relevance of culture and narratives in the sustainable development processes, demonstrating the benefits of increased attention on building intra- and interpersonal literacy and broadening the scope of accepted knolwedge, suggesting practical steps for improving cross-sectoral cooperation and a periodisation of sustainable development processes in Europe. It is suggested that if the civil society and governance levels manage to build capacities for cross-sectoral cooperation, it would open doors for developing new win-win solutions that could contribute significantly to the Great Transformation in the EU.

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| | |
|---|---|
| A21 | Agenda 21 |
| A2030 | Agenda 2030 |
| BMU | German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety |
| CS | Civil society level |
| CSD | Commission on Sustainable Development |
| DE | Germany |
| DESD | Decade for Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014, a UNESCO initiative |
| DG ENV | Directorate-General for the Environment at the European Commission |
| EC | European Commission |
| EDAP | Energy Descent Action Plan of the Transition network |
| EDE | Ecovillage Design Education program based on the experiences of GEN |
| EE | Estonia |
| ENDS | Portuguese National Sustainable Development Strategy |
| EU | European Union |
| EU SDS | European Union Sustainable Development Strategy |
| GT | Grounded theory |
| GEN | Global Ecovillage Network |
| GEN-E | Global Ecovillage Network Europe |
| GOV | Governance level |
| LA21 | Local Agenda 21 |
| LDI | Let's do it! |
| LDI-N | Let's do it! Network |
| NSDS | National sustainable development strategy |
| NIMBY | "Not in my backyard" type of social protest movement |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| PEA | Portuguese Environment Agency |
| PT | Portugal |
| SD | Sustainable development |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SDS | Sustainable development strategy |
| SE21 | Estonian national sustainable development strategy "Sustainable Estonia 21" |
| TN | Transition network |
| T2R | Transition to Resilience, joint educational program of TN, GEN and further actors |
| UCLG | United Cities and Local Governments |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCED | United Nations Conference on Environment and Development |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| WCED | World Commission on Environment and Development |
| WSSD | World Summit on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+10 |
| YIMBY | "Yes in My Back Yard" type of social movement |

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, human activities left relatively light marks on the planet. The change began with industrial revolution. The constantly increasing use of fossil fuels led to the rise of the current fossil fuel dependent petroculture[1] societies. Supported by increasing urbanisation, globalisation of trade and population growth, the petroculture societies have been causing serious environmental degradation. Within a short period of time humans have significantly changed the environment: ever-growing human population has resulted in extensive deforestation for commodities and food production, burning fossil fuels has changed the chemical structure of the atmosphere, the amounts of polluted water and trash have created new unusable and toxic landscapes (White 2008).

The negative impacts of such development efforts started to rise to public and political spotlight in the 1960s and 1970s. The growing sense of environmental responsibility was further fostered by mass media and publication of influential texts on pollution and pesticides (Carson 1962, Bookchin 1962), careful husbandry of resources (Ward 1966, Hardin 1968), overpopulation (Ehrlich and Ehrlich 1968) and the limits to growth (Meadows et al 1972), making many people question for the first time the sense of the continuing on the chosen development path.

In some areas experiencing the pollution and dire social misery helped to understand the reality of the consequences faster, while in others, including much of Europe, the immediate effects have been less obvious and disturbing. However, by mid-1980s sociologist Ulrich Beck expressed the concern of thousands of people when he articulated the world risk society model of the current historically unique era, characterised by a high degree of uncertainty, unprecedented possibility of control over life and explosive risks, including possibilities of human self-destruction and self-transformation via gene manipulation (Beck 1986). The Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine was among the events that significantly contributed to public awareness raise in 1980s. 1987 was the European Year of the Environment, and a year when the Single European Act incorporated environmental policy into the Treaty of Rome, which meant a turning point as environmental protection requirements were to become a component in the Community's other policies.

So the time was ripe for the idea of sustainable development as a new development model aiming to "marry" the often contradicting economic and environmental interests (Sachs 1997: 71). Since the publication of the first and to date probably the most widely accepted definition of sustainable development in the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report "Our Common Future" in 1987, and especially after the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, sustainable development has become increasingly accepted as the development path for coping with negative effects and turning towards more balanced development.

## 1.1. Problem statement

By the mid 2000nds sustainable development (SD) had become a commonly accepted developmental goal in Europe, evidenced by hundreds of national, regional and local SD-initiatives and strategies. By

[1] The concept of petroculture is understood here in a similar manner to the Petrocultures Research Initiative at the University of Alberta, led by Dr. Imre Szeman (Petroculture Research Initiative 2014).

the end of the first decade of the new century much had been achieved in the European Union (EU) and its member states. However, when looking more closely, the situation in practice seemed more diverse than what was been expressed in rhetoric and called for further investigation.

The first problem was the bold claim that SD has been mainstreamed in the EU. Different reports have shown that despite the rhetoric consensus on the relevance of SD, in practice the progress has remained modest. This created doubt in the legitimacy and credibility of this claim. Doubt in the extent of having mainstreamed SD has also been expressed by other researchers (e.g. Barnes and Hoerber 2013). To avoid oversimplifying generalisations, it makes sense to distinguish between different regions and societal groups when analysing the SD situation across Europe, which this study aims to do.

The second issue provoking this study was related to the vagueness of the SD concept. Most definitions have to do with living within limits (though which limits precisely, varies); balancing economic, social and ecological development dimensions (although which aspects are included, varies); and equitable distribution of opportunities and resources (although what is considered equal and fair, varies again). Also the to date probably most widely accepted definition of SD is quite vague when it states: "*...sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*" (WCED 1987). The vagueness has ensured SD wide acceptance across stakeholders, but also paved a way to confusions and devaluation of the concept as an empty signifier or a greenwashing tool (e.g. Sachs 1997, Sebaldt 2002, Faber et al. 2005, Goggin 2009, Grabe 2010). SD seems to suggest a better way of life so people tend to support it and it can easily seem that there is a consensus in Europe on the urgency of achieving SD. However, studying the approaches more closely, the shallowness of this consensus becomes clear. The desired concrete developments attributed to SD by different stakeholders can be very different. Practical development choices are always specific, and tend to benefit certain societal groups more than others. As different interpretations of SD are useful for different social groups for different purposes, so the SD concept is a highly context sensitive power-concept that needs more clarity and reflexivity than the current positive vagueness is providing.

The third problem is related to cooperation. When studying the principal SD-related documents, programs and strategies, they all stress the relevance of broad public support and participation for making the needed changes happen. There is a rhetoric consensus that in order to achieve SD, the current practices need to change and for that broad public participation and cooperation are needed. The SD concept has enjoyed popularity across different interest groups over the past decades, acting as a connecting link and cooperation catalyst between different groups as a way to create a better, more sustainable and equal future for all. However, there seems to be a curious gap between the urgency of SD in words and the relatively slow pace of change in practice. It seems relevant to trace the obstacles hindering the desired broad-based and cross-sectoral cooperation.

The fourth problem is that there seems to be a deficiency of empirical and qualitative research on the current situation to help to clarify the above mentioned issues. Research in sustainability, or sustainability studies, is a relatively new field. Although there were some early pioneers, such as sociologists Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess in the 1920s or the economist Kenneth E. Boulding in the 1950s, the biologist Rachel Carson in the 1960s or the sociologists Riley Dunlap and William Catton in the 1970s, the mainstream scientific community did not start to tackle the human-nature relationship issues in a more interconnected manner until the mid-1980s. The coining of the SD concept in 1980s was an attempt to reconcile developmentalism and environmentalism. Since then considerable input on human relationships with development and nature has been provided by representatives of different disciplines. What motivated this study was the observation that focus on the external, visible, quantifiable and collective macrolevel aspects of human development seems to

have sidelined the invisible and inner cultural aspects. These issues are not included in prestigious anthologies on SD (e.g. Barry et al. 2004, Brauch et al 2011, Barnes and Hoerber 2013). Aiming to map the wide range of sustainability issues and challenges they focus on politics, governance and economic issues including urban sustainability, green economy and corporate social responsibility, security threats, risks and vulnerabilities including climate change issues, resource use, inequality and globalisation, mobility, biodiversity and health management, and technological innovation. These quantitatively measurable macrolevel topics are relevant, but they tend to sidelines the intangible, invisible and non-quantifiable aspects that also have a significant impact on the success or failure of the desired developments. Consequently, the voice, experiences, needs and strategies of civil society (CS) practitioners seemed underrepresented when considering solutions to the SD-crisis. As many CS initiatives and networks are focused on action and do not have much written documents to analyse, this study set out to broaden the knowledge base and collect empirical material to analyse their SD approaches along with the governance level. At the time of research there was a limited amount of empirical studies of international civil society initiatives active in promoting SD in Europe. There were several studies on Transition Town movement mostly concerning specific towns, comparing e.g. economic aspects or sustainability transition of several towns (e.g. Silly 2011). There were also some studies on Global Ecovillage Network, mostly case studies of specific ecovillages or studies covering their socio-ecological practices (e.g. Kunze 2009). At the time data collection, there was no study done on the Let's do it! movement. There were no qualitative comparative studies on the SD approaches of internationally active civil society movements in Europe, nor their relationships with governance approaches.

## 1.2. Aims and research questions

This research does not aim to define what sustainable development (SD) is. Instead, it aims to look beyond the seeming consensus and explore SD rhetoric and practices among civil society and governance stakeholders in different parts of Europe to find out how they understand sustainable development: what are the perceived problems and ways for solving them. Drawing from perspectives of practitioners from several sectors, it aims to create a grounded theory of SD- situation in Europe.

To find out more about different SD-related perspectives, interpretations and actions in Europe, sixteen case studies from civil society and governance levels across the EU were included in the case study sample. By studying empirically and theoretically different approaches pursued under the shared banner of SD, this book analyses the reasons for the gaps between rhetoric and practices in the European context and explores the role played by the often sidelined qualitative and cultural aspects in understanding and putting SD to practice, hopefully helping to broaden the spectrum of legitimate aspects of SD. Mapping and analysing different SD-approaches helps to make sense of the often contradictory processes and can provide info on ways to overcome the gaps between the urgent need for more joint action in rhetoric and the fragmented and moderate pace of actions in practice.

Another aim was to understand the reasons for the currently dispersed cooperation resulting in limited progress in achieving SD aims, leading groups to reinventing the wheel instead of joining efforts in co-productive synergy.

A further aim was to include a broader scope of actors interested in sustainability transition to the sample in order to bring together contributions from sustainability practitioners from diverse locations, settings and sectors in the EU. More specifically, the aim was helping to fill a gap in qualitative research on civil society and governance approaches to SD in the EU. Collecting, analysing and making available new information from new data sources about the SD situation in EU makes it

possible to making the SD approaches of the less studied civil society (CS) movements accessible and include their voices, experiences, needs and solutions when considering the situation and seeking for solutions. This way of doing research, accompanying and at some points helping to catalyse the transformation processes to understand them better, can be described as transdisciplinary research (Schneidewind 2014). The empirical and theoretical analysis gives ground for making grounded statements about the situation aiming to help research participants and interested people in understanding the European SD scene.

Thus, this research aims to contribute to making the often unnoticed principal differences behind the seemingly unanimous support for sustainable development visible in order to contribute to filling the gaps in understanding the SD-related civil society and governance rhetoric and practices across the EU. Helping to understand the current sustainability situation in the EU better has the potential to facilitate mutual understanding and finding of common ground to foster developments beyond sectoral interests. This is considered relevant for overcoming the situation where urgent need for change is expressed in rhetoric, but in practice the actions tend to be fragmented and relatively slow paced. These aims fit well with the aim of grounded theory analysis, which is to generate theory "*that accounts for the patterns of behaviour which are relevant and problematic for those involved*" (Glaser 1978: 93). Furthermore, the results can be relevant also to people not directly involved in the European situation.

Summing up the considerations outlined under problem statement and aims, the following research questions were asked throughout this study:

**The primary research questions were:**

- How is the SD concept understood by the GOV and CS actors in the sample?
- Which solutions for achieving a more sustainable future are suggested and practiced?
- What is the situation in the European Union – has SD really been mainstreamed?

**Secondary research questions were:**

- Why has the progress of the SD-pioneer EU slowed down considerably since ca. 2009?
- Do the SD-approaches depend more on national context or belonging to a stakeholder group?
- Which are the main reasons hindering the desired cross-sectoral cooperation towards SD?
- Which is the role of culture in facilitating or hindering the transition towards SD?
- Which sustainability in the interests of whom do the different SD approaches generate?

These research questions are neither purely practical nor purely conceptual in nature and can thus be classified as applied research questions (Turabian 2007: 9). Applied questions aim to find out what needs to be known before practical problems can be solved, and indicate possible steps towards solutions.

# 1.3. Research approach and process

Qualitative research approach was chosen for this study as it enabled an open approach when seeking answers to the research questions. Informed by social constructivism and qualitative research tradition, reflexivity was considered of key relevance for ensuring transparency and credibility of the findings. I agree with Roger Smith who suggested that without being explicit about the reasons behind the research choices, there are hardly any guarantees of being objective in qualitative research (2005: 6).

The choice of investigating worldview systems was motivated by my personal experience of having lived in two basically different ones – the communist and capitalist systems – and the transition period between them. Growing up in the Soviet occupied communist Estonia, and receiving my education and first work experiences in newly independent capitalist Estonia, I experienced first-hand the fast changing of values and behaviours – how what was previously considered relevant and true transformed rapidly to being irrelevant or false. Having studied the functioning of utopias as mechanisms of cultural dynamic, I becaume interested in sustainable development concept as a kind of eutopia, an ideal that has not been reached, promising a better, fairer and juster, less destructive and wasteful way of life considering the needs of present and future generations. This roused my interest in studying what lays behind the consensus for the need to achieve sustainable development (SD).

The qualitative reflective approach also informed the choice of methodology that supports it: the constructivist grounded theory. Grounded theory (GT) method means the systematic generation of theory from data, using both inductive and deductive approaches in different phases of research with the goal of discovering the participants' main concern(s) and ways how they try to resolve them. Rooted in pragmatism and relativist epistemology, constructivist GT assumes that neither data nor theories are discovered, but are constructed by the researcher as a result of their interactions with the field, participants, and data.

To study the sustainability scene in Europe, a sample of sixteen case studies representing civil society and governance cases from three historically, environmentally, politically, economically and culturally different areas of Europe were chosen. The sample included the European Union, Estonia, Germany, and Portugal as governance cases and the Global Ecovillage Network, Transition Network and Let's do it! Network and their member initiatives in each case study country as civil society cases. The focus of the research lays on the developments between 2000 and 2014. The fieldwork period lasted for three years from 2011 to 2014 and was followed through in several shorter phases. To some extent the most relevant developments up to 2015 were taken into account, for example the process for forming a post-2015 agenda merging the Millennium Development Goals (MFG-s) with new Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-s) took place until autumn 2015. However, the developments after 2014 do not belong to the focus of this research and are only considered briefly.

The primary data consisted of different types of texts ranging from strategic policy documents to website texts, as well as transcripts of qualitative semi-structured interviews and structured expert interviewsmade for this research, fieldwork notes, and theoretical memos. Secondary data consisted of existing research for contextualising the preliminary findings in a broader scholarly context.

The empirical GT based research process started with fieldwork and preceded for several years along with iterative data collecting and analysis rounds. The analysis began with open coding and finished with theoretical coding, resulting in core themes and concepts, capturing the essence of the approaches to SD and helping to explain most of the participants' main concerns with as much variation as possible, as well as the behaviour of participants in resolving their main concerns. The method made it possible to investigate how the case study groups construct the meaning of SD and make sense of related processes, which are the problems according to them and which solutions they see for solving the perceived problems. A a more detailed overview can be found in Chapter 2.

# 1.4. Structure

The book is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the research problems and aims by mapping the current research stand and perceived gaps in SD research. Next, the research questions are outlined and an overview of the research approach, process and structure of this book are provided.

The second chapter introduces the chosen constructivist grounded theory approach and qualitative research design. It describes the research process, explains the criteria for choosing the sample, provides the first introduction to the selected case study actors and gives an overview of the data.

The third chapter is the first analytical chapter, offering an analytical overview of the development of environmental concern and the emergence and development of the sustainable development scene[2]. Based on analysis of secondary literature, it provides the vital context for understanding the analysis of the SD developments in the following chapter. The chapter starts with discussing the rise of environmental concern in the North and in the EU in particular. Next, the development of the SD discourse and processes are discussed and finally, an overview of the formal developments of the case study actors leading to prioritising sustainable development is given.

The fourth chapter is the second analytical chapter and constitutes the backbone of this reasearch by providing an analysis of the SD-approaches of the sixteen case studies. This analysis is based mainly on primary data including documents and other texts produced by the actors, qualitative semi-structured and expert interviews, and if applicable, fieldwork observations. Starting with the civil society approaches to sustainability, the chapter opens up the results of the GT research process. Based on the core themes and concepts of the cases and proceeding from individual cases to the network/union level, the synthesised civil society and governance approaches to SD are discussed.

The fifth and final chapter finalises the analysis by contextualising the case study results in extent literature. Thus theoretical saturation is reached and a grounded theory of the SD situation in Europe is articulated, outlining two metanarratives of change. In the following section “Conclusions” the contributions, limitations and reflection of this research are outlined.

The main chapters are followed by “Summary”, “Bibliography” and three “Appendices” with information about the interviews, sample questionnaires and tables with core themes and categories.

[2] Introducing the case study groups in two chapters is intentional. In Chapter 2 the first introduction to the sample is made, and in Chapter 3 a detailed analysis of their development towards SD agendas is conducted.

# CHAPTER 2

# METHODOLOGY

This chapter serves to explain the research design, methodology and methods, formation of the sample, and the research process. After presenting the reasons for selecting a qualitative approach, the reasons for choosing the grounded theory methodology are discussed. Further, the criteria for choosing the sample as well as the first introduction to the case study actors are provided. Subsequently, an overview of the data is given. The chapter ends with an overview of the research process.

## 2.1. Research design: social constructivist approach

A qualitative approach was chosen because its open and context-sensitive nature makes it suitable for studying complex and emerging processes, such as the sustainable development situation in Europe across sectors and regions. Enabling flexible investigation of often implicit assumptions and expectations, and also considering exceptional phenomena, mostly discarded in quantitative research, provided better conditions for exploring the SD processes than would have been possible using quantitative methods. The advantages of quantitative research approach would have included a more clear-cut, predefined and linear research process, the possibility to include a larger number of actors to the sample, and better comparability of the identified variables. However, the variables would have been chosen "in the armchair" prior to data collection, which would not have served my purpose of remaining open to different considerations emerging from the field to discover the participants' main concerns and ways how they try to resolve them. The quantitative approach would have meant that the context-sensitivity relevant for the research project would have been largely lost.

The research approach builds on social constructivism. There are three postulates at the heart of social constructivism: society is created by humans, society is objective reality and humans are the product of society (Berger & Luckmann 1967: 79). In social processes, different subjective experiential knowledge is typologised. Their repetitive and habitual use leads to their institutionalisation, and after that it becomes possible to talk about objectified knowledge. In other words, the institutionalised whole, which we call the world, is an objectified human experience. To signify the whole human experience, Berger and Luckmann use the concept of the "symbolic universe" and define it as the matrix of all socially objectivised and subjectively real meanings (Berger 1967: 114-120). Social constructivism served as the basis of the research approach and methodology, and also helped to contextualise the findings in the scientific discourse.

The research approach, accompanying and at some points helping to catalyse the transformation processes to understand them better, can also be described as transdisciplinary (Schneidewind 2014: 2), drawing from perspectives of practitioners from several sectors and theoretical approaches of several disciplines to create a grounded theory of sustainable development situation in Europe. In the context of this research I took the catalysing role primarily in the case of LDI Germany to facilitate the development of the team to be able to complete the sample by including Germany and gain first hand insights into the related processes[3].

[3] See also 3.4.1.3.2. on the development of LDI! Germany and 5.3.3. reflecting on the research experience.

### 2.1.1. Reasons for choosing grounded theory methodology

The grounded theory (GT) method was first introduced in 1965 by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in response to the dominantly positivist thinking in sociology in the 1960s in their book "Awareness of Dying", based on joint research on dying hospital patients. GT was introduced in more detail in their 1967 book "The Discovery of Grounded Theory". Its aim was to provide a critical approach to developing legitimate systematic qualitative research and developing a theory (Strauss and Corbin 1994). After surviving the methodological struggles of the 1970s and 1980s, when the very existence of qualitative research was questioned, GT has gradually gained popularity (Denzin and Lincoln 2011:1). GT can be defined as a method of qualitative inquiry in which data collection and analysis reciprocally inform and shape each other through an emergent iterative process (Charmaz 2011: 360). For this reason, it is also called the constant comparative method.

The goal of GT is to generate theories that explain how some aspect of the social world works by developing a theory that emerges by systematically and iteratively working with the data. The goal of a GT study is to discover the participants' main concern(s) and how they continually try to resolve it. The questions repeatedly asked in grounded theory are: What is going on? What is the main problem of the participants, and how are they trying to solve it? By finding answers to these questions, patterns start to emerge. The grounded theory methodology is not seeking to develop a new description, but a new theory grounded in systematically and iteratively gathered and analysed data, exceeding the limits of a specific context. Based on conceptual ideas, generated by constantly comparing conceptualized data on different levels of abstraction, a hypothesis or theory is developed.

Methods evolve over time and sometimes even their main exponents grow to differ significantly in their interpretations. This is also the case with GT. Its initiators continued to develop it independently from each other, resulting in the Straussian and Glaserian versions of GT. For this study the constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006, 2011) was used, which can also be called Charmazian, as Kathy Charmaz is considered its leading exponent (Denzin and Lincoln 2011: 248).

The constructivist GT approach adds an interpretive mode to classic GT by assuming that any theoretical rendering offers an *"interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it"* (Charmaz 2006: 10). Rooted in pragmatism and relativist epistemology, it assumes that researchers are not considered separate from data or their theories. It does not consider that data or theories are discovered, but constructed by the researcher through their interactions with people, places, and research perspectives (Allen 2010: 1612). Data is co-constructed by researcher and participants, and coloured by the researcher's perspectives, values, privileges, positions, interactions, and geographical locations. To summarise the epistemological motivation behind choosing the constructivist approach, the key differences, and similarities with other grounded theory approaches are presented in a list below (based on Charmaz 2006; Bryant and Charmaz 2010, Charmaz 2011).

The main reasons guiding the decision to use constructivist GT-approach are that it rejects claims of objectivity, accepts the perception of constructedness, and emphasizes the importance of reflexivity. The constructivist GT allows for more open and creative interpretation, lack of which has been criticised in the Glaserian and Straussian approaches (Thomas and James 2006). This position takes a middle ground between the realist and postmodernist positions by assuming an obdurate reality (Blumer 1969: 22) while assuming multiple realities and multiple perspectives on these realities.

Furthermore, classical GT features no pre-research literature review demand, not talking about the research before it is written up and not taping the interviews, resulting in optimal freedom (Glaser 1998). These aspects are meant to facilitate the theory emergence, providing freedom to generate new concepts explaining human behaviour. However, I recognize the value of recording, as well as transcribing interviews rather than just taking notes, because many details which do not seem relevant

at first and will be forgotten later can become significant as patterns start to emerge out of data. Without being able to check the conversations, there is no possibility to refer to it or quote it to include the voice of the case study actors, which helps to "*keep the human story in the forefront of the reader's mind and make the conceptual analysis more accessible to a wider audience"* (Charmaz 2000: 516). Also, in the current academic world, the point of *no talk* was impossible to adhere to, as I was expected to regularly report and share the results of my research. However, I experienced the value of this suggestion, as talking and writing about the GT research in its early stages was difficult due to the ambiguity inherent in the GT approach with its slowly emerging sample, research focus and questions. I was also not able to fully obey the no pre-research literature review demand as studying related literature was necessary for writing research proposals and scholarship applications. The point of leaving the literature review to the end of the research is that early literature review promotes preconceptions about what to find in the data and the researcher runs the risk of becoming desensitized by those borrowed concepts. I wrote up the theoretical ideas that I had before starting and while researching as theoretical memos to be analysed as further data in the course of the research, and did the bulk of literature review in the second half of the research period, to contextualise the findings. Some of the key benefits of using the grounded theory approach for this study include:

**Novelty.** GT is good for studying previously little studied emerging areas (Urquhart 2001), as its systematic iterative and comparative nature allows the researcher to yield a great richness of information and facilitates discovering implicit patterns, actions, and meanings (Lehmann 2001: 87). The SD scene in Europe is an emerging phenomenon that has not been sufficiently and extensively studied, especially in a comparative way focusing on the governance and civil society rhetoric and practices, making GT an excellent choice. Charmaz points out that GT contains tools for analysing and situating processes through explicating their participants' implicit meanings and actions and defining relevant processes in their context, specifying the conditions in which these processes occur, conceptualizing their phases, explicating what contributes to their stability or change, and finally, outlining their consequences (Charmaz 2011: 361).

**Flexibility.** GT uses both inductive and deductive methods in different phases of the research. Indeed, the GT research starts inductively with the researcher looking at data first and then forming the hypotheses, and ends deductively in the theoretical sampling phase when the researcher seeks research data to verify the deduction (Glaser 1998: 43). Another flexible feature is that when used to generate theory, it can be applied to social units of any size, from micro to macro levels (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2011). This study focuses on social actors on various levels and scales from international actors like the EU to local actors like the Transition initiative in Telheiras, Lisbon. Also, although the long-term objective of GT is theory construction, Charmaz estimates that it is also helpful for data collection and analysis without theory construction, as its emphases on empirical scrutiny and analytic precision fosters creating nuanced analyses of how social and economic conditions work in specific situations (Charmaz 2011: 360).

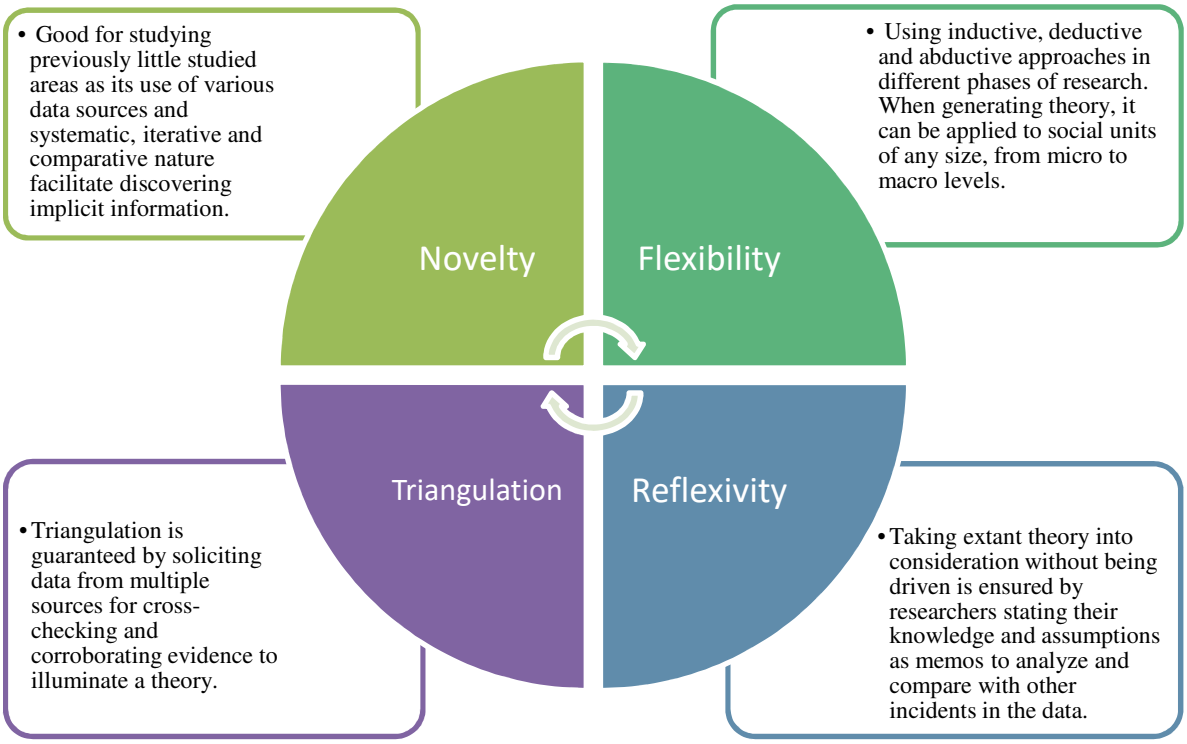
**Reflexivity.** One of the main characteristics of GT is that the researcher has to be open enough to set aside theoretical ideas during the research procedure and precede with broad research questions in mind. Numerous grounded theory users stress that this does not mean that GT practitioners presume being a clean slate at the outset of the study is possible or desirable, but that the GT takes presuppositions and extant theory into consideration, but is not driven by it (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Urquhart, 2001; Fernandez 2005). Fernandez explains that the critical point is that the research does not start with a theory to prove or disprove (Fernandez 2005: 45). This is achieved by using the constant comparative method, which forces researchers to state their own knowledge and assumptions

as data in the form of memos to analyse and compare with other incidents in the data, generating concepts from it. "All is data" is a fundamental property of GT, meaning that anything that helps to generate concepts for the emerging theory is regarded as data.

**Triangulation via the constant comparative method.** The process of collecting data from multiple and different data sources as a means of cross-checking and corroborating evidence and illuminating a theme is understood as triangulation (Glaser 1978, 1998; Glaser and Strauss 1967). GT emphasizes the importance of studying processes in the field setting, and the benefits of including various data sources, as it increases the probability of producing a novel theory through creative insights that often arise from contradictory or even paradoxical evidence. Constant comparison enables intensive iterative intellectual interaction with the data and facilitates the generation of complex *"theories of process, sequence, and change pertaining to organizations, positions, and social interaction [that] correspond closely to the data since the constant comparison forces the analyst to consider much diversity in the data"* (Glaser & Strauss 1967: 113-114). The close connection between theory and data increases the probability that the theory can be further tested and expanded by subsequent studies as *"validation is performed implicitly and consistently by constant comparison, questioning the data from the start of the process"* (Eisenhardt 1989: 547). Charmaz concludes: *"This systematic scrutiny increases analytic precision and keeps us close to the data, strengthening our claims about it"* (2011: 361).

**Relevance**. In GT, relevance means avoiding stating the obvious and bringing tangible benefits to the experts. To be relevant to practitioners' concerns, the theory needs to provide meaningful accounts for them. Fernandez points out that using GT means providing conceptual ideas grounded in patterns, allowing the practitioners to transcend the limits of their own experience, adapting and applying the substantive theory to other, further situations (Fernandez 2005: 58). In other words, GT can help to produce a clear, logical and parsimonious theory that fulfils the canons of good science and simultaneously can be used to explain and predict the phenomena in its environment (Partington 2000). Figure 1 below sums up the benefits of GT approach.

**Figure 1. Overview of benefits of using the GT approach.**



## 2.1.2. Grounded theory research logic

The research process in grounded theory consists of several steps, most of which are repetitive, called iterative in this context. The process begins with choosing the phenomenon of interest and the first case of interest according to the initial broad research question. After that, investigating what is going on in the field, what are the problem and the solutions for the stakeholders by collecting and analysing empirical data, the research focus, sample, and questions are adjusted and sharpened. Data collection and analysis forms an iterative and systematic process of constantly moving in and out of the data collection and analysis process.

As a research method, GT operates in almost a reverse fashion from a traditional research model. Rather than beginning with a hypothesis, followed by literature research, forming of research question and entering the field, the first step in GT research is forming a broad research question, followed by the choice of the first case study and a circle of data collection and analyses, followed by further sampling and specification of questions, data collection and analysis in iterative circles. **Analysis** begins with **coding** the data, which takes place from open to theoretical coding, whereby the key points are sifted out in a coding procedure assigning the texts a series of codes, which are extracted from the text ("in vitro codes") or are based on it ("in vivo codes"). This way concepts and categories are produced, which ground the emerging theory. **Open coding** aims to conceptualize on the first level of abstraction to find out about the problem and how it is being resolved. These are compared as one codes more data, and merged into new concepts, and eventually renamed and modified. The codes are grouped into similar concepts to make the data more workable. The codes are tested out with new rounds of data collection and analysis. The scope of the study is limited through selective coding, which makes it move fast as it is not as concerned with accuracy as descriptive studies, but with identifying relevant aspects. Through selective coding **core variable(s)** emerge, explaining most of the participants' main concern and the behaviour of the participants in resolving their main concern with as much variation as possible, but with as few properties as possible. The tentative core is never wrong – it just fits the data more or less.

The core starts to guide sampling and coding leaving aside concepts with little importance to the core – this process is called **theoretical sampling,** forming the deductive part of GT. Concepts and categories crystallize as a result of the theoretical coding phase. Theoretical coding means that the researcher applies a theoretical model which has emerged during the comparative process. Concepts are collections of codes with similar content allowing the data to be grouped. From these concepts, categories are formed, which are the basis for the creation of a theory. Categories are broad groups of similar concepts that are used to generate a theory. The analysis continues until theoretical saturation is reached.

**Memoing** is an important aspect in GT analysis throughout the process helping to conceptualise the incidents and later, in the form of theoretical memoing to build up the theory (Glaser 1998). Memos are important tools for both refining and keeping track of ideas that develop during the iterative data collection and analysis circles when comparing incidents to incidents and concepts to concepts in the evolving theory and trying out their relationships. Without memoing the theory runs the risk of remaining superficial and the concepts generated not very original. Writing memos the ideas become more realistic by being converted from thoughts to words communicable to others. The **sorting of memos** is a further important theoretical process and the key to formulating the theory for presentation to others. Sorting puts fractured data back together and allows new ideas to emerge, resulting in a theory that explains the main action in the studied area with strong, coherent connections between the concepts. The theoretical density should be dosed so that concepts are mixed with the description in words, tables, or figures to optimize readability. In the later **rewriting,** the relevant

literature is woven in to put the theory in a scholarly context. In the end, a grounded theory emerges as a collection of categories that detail the subject of the research and explicate the relationships between the categories.

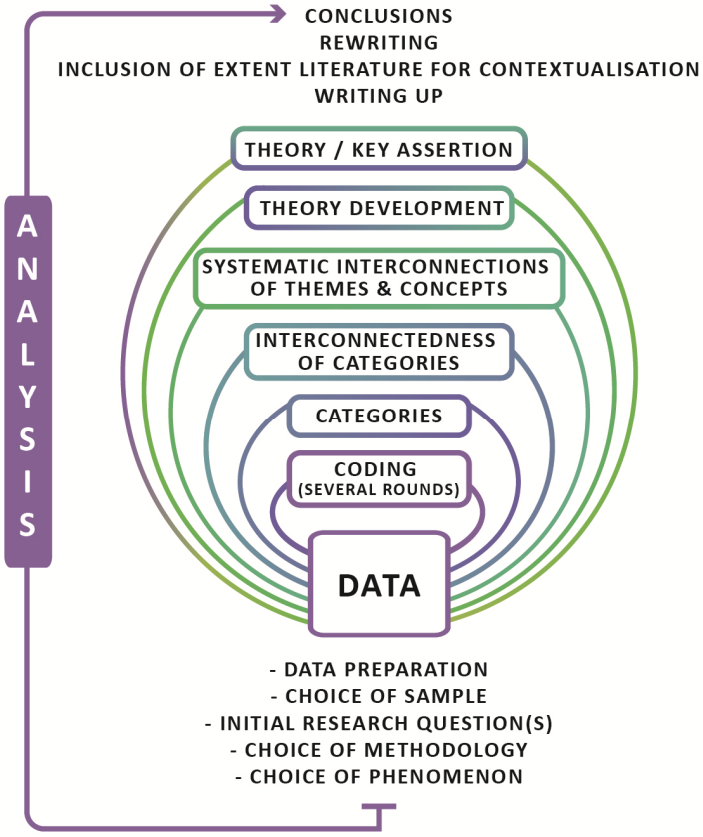



**Figure 2. Depiction of the cyclical nature of the grounded theory research process.**

Thus, in several ways the GT research contradicts the traditional research approach (Allan 2003).

## 2.1.3. Quality of grounded theory

The aim of using grounded theory is to aid theory construction by generating concepts that explain the way people resolve their central concerns. The use of description in GT is mainly to illustrate the concepts and their interrelations. The quality is judged by fit, relevance, workability, and modifiability (Glaser & Strauss 1967, Glaser 1998). This means that a GT is never right or wrong – it just has more or less fitness, relevance, workability and modifiability:

- fitness describes the extent to which the concepts fit with the incidents they are representing, depending in turn on how exhaustively the constant comparison of incidents to concepts was done;
- relevance means that a study deals with the real concerns of the participants and captures their attention, not only academic interest;
- workability means that a theory explains how the problem is being solved with much variation;
- a modifiable theory is flexible and can be altered when new relevant data is compared to existing data.

The GT results are an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses developed from empirical data (Glaser 1998). In a way, GT resembles what many researchers do when retrospectively formulating new

hypotheses to fit the data. However, in GT the researcher does not formulate the hypotheses in advance as preconceived hypotheses tend to result in a theory ungrounded in data (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

# 2.2. Research process

The objective of this section is to present an overview of the activities involved in doing this study to facilitate understanding the logic and scope of this research, and facilitate evaluating its results. The main steps elaborated on include preparatory steps, entering the field, collecting data, analysis including iterative coding rounds for theory building, and evaluation of the process.

## 2.2.1. Preparatory steps

**Planning the research.** It is common that a tentative research plan has to be produced at the outset of the study. However, the GT methodology leaves much open at the beginning of the study, making it impossible to provide a similarly detailed research plan with fixed research questions, literature review, description of the sample and the research process. All these factors become clear once the research process has already started in the process of constant comparison in the course of data collection and analysis cycles. So although the main question on approaches to SD among civil society groups was clear, the groups making up the sample became clear only in the course of multiple data collection and analysis phases, which also informed the decision to include the governance level to the sample. The way the GT research logic deviates from the usual research logic, going against expectations, made the initial research phase more difficult, having to explain over and over why this research design is so different and that this is not the result of ignorance, but intentional.

Initial difficulties made it obvious that the GT approach is less widely used and accepted in academic circles in Germany as I had thought at the outset of this project. This meant having to justify and clarify the grounded theory logic and process many times over, and occasionally accepting the dismissal of the project because of the specific nature of the chosen methodology.

**Preparations before entering the field.** Following the grounded theory tradition, the study assumed that the problem was to be discovered from accounts of people and stakeholders in the substantive area of enquiry through analysing their rhetoric and practices through interviews, textual analysis, and fieldwork. Thus the preparation period was relatively short spanning over six months. The preparatory steps included:

- planning the research
- initial choice of the research issue
- choice of methodology fitting the research issue
- acquainting myself with the sustainable development scene in Europe
- recording my pre-research assumptions and hypotheses regarding how the change towards sustainability is perceived by different groups. These assumptions, recorded in the form of memos, were handled according to the method as a slice of data and compared along with other data. During the course of the study, many initial assumptions were abandoned as they didn't coincide with the emerging patterns.

## 2.2.2. Entering the field and collecting data

**Entering the field and theoretical sampling.** Entering the field and theoretical sampling began with familiarizing myself with texts produced by some possible sample groups. This enabled to identify some local concepts, principles, and patterns of the phenomenon of interest.

Based on this initial info, it became evident that a combination of data sources was most appropriate for finding the answers and that multiple case studies are necessary for detecting patterns. In grounded theory sampling is driven by the conceptual emergence and limited by theoretical saturation, not by design (Glaser & Strauss 1967: 45). Thus, the whole choice of case studies was not made *a priori* at the start of the research. The rationale for selecting comparison groups was their theoretical relevance to fostering the development of emergent categories. The selection of specific case study countries and civil initiative networks followed the initial data collection round. Lilleoru ecovillage in Estonia was selected as the first case study due to previous research knowledge. This also meant that Estonia as a country and Global Ecovillage Network as a civil initiative network were selected as case studies. Lilleoru was selected as the initial case because I was already known to the gatekeepers and had an understanding of the functioning of the ecovillage due to my master thesis about them. Through Lilleoru I also had initial contacts with GEN representatives.

Next steps included contacting the gatekeepers, negotiating an agreement for participation in the project and access to the case study locations. After that the initial key informants (coincided mostly with the gatekeepers, and suggested by them) were identified, and the first interviews were made, followed by initial analysis of the collected data informing the following steps about data gathering. Not all groups involved in this research were easily accessible. On several occasions, I didn't receive any answers to my e-mails and phone calls and in two instances the attempts to establish contact and arrange a short interview lasted for over six months. The accessibility had to do with location as well as sector. Choosing Estonia as the first case study country had the benefit of easier access to government officials, due to language-related issues (they were able to speak in their native language, the other expert interviews were conducted in English), as well as geographical reasons (due to family reasons I visit Estonia several times a year and was able to conduct one of the two expert interviews in person). Accessibility of governance employees seems better in a small country, as the Portuguese and German officials were more difficult to contact and it was possible to make the respective interviews only in the last phase of the research. Most difficulties occurred in Portuguese case, especially with accessing the governance level, but also with one of the civil society case study groups, among other things also due to language reasons. The choice of the foundation cases was successful, giving good access to the field and the overall research process.

**Data collection.** GT research process can be described as a spiral moving between data collection, analysis, and theorizing, allowing flexibility and continuous sharpening of emerging constructs via deep familiarization with data, validation, and progressive expansion of knowledge and skills (Fernandez 2005: 48). Methods for data collection in this study were classical ethnographic methods: fieldwork including participant observation, different types of qualitative interviewing, collection of artefacts and texts. The interviews, field notes, memos, and documents produced by the case study groups proved to be the most important data sources in the context of this research.

Data collection rounds took place throughout the research period, and different types of data were collected with different intensity in different data-collection rounds. For example, documents were often collected separately from conducting the interviews and doing the fieldwork, as they were sampled when needed during the analysis process. Four distinctive major fieldwork and interview data collection phases can be distinguished:

**Table 1. Data collection: fieldwork and interview phases from 2011 to 2013.**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1st round | fieldwork and interviews in TT Freiburg (DE), in GEN in Tamera (PT), TT Telheiras (PT) and LDI (EE) |
| 2nd round | fieldwork and interviews in Lilleoru ecovillage (EE), TT Freiburg (DE), LDI Germany (DE) |
| 3rd round | interviews governance (EE), fieldwork and interviews in 7L (DE), LDI (DE), TT Paide (EE), LDI (PT) |
| 4rd round | last expert interviews with governance officials (DE, PT, EU) |

**Interviewing.** Qualitative interviews constituted a key source of information for this research, enabling the flexible collection of data directly from participants. Depending on the aim, three types of interviews were made with informants: long (ca. 3h) informal, unstructured interviews for initial orientation upon entering new contexts with initial gatekeepers; semi-structured interviews (ca. 1-2h) with selected informants; and short (ca. 30-60min) formal structured expert interviews with governance representatives. In total, 34 qualitative interviews were made for the thesis, including five expert interviews with government officials, and two group interviews with civil society groups. The interviews were conducted in three languages: English, Estonian and German according to what suited the interview partner best.

The interview partners were selected using the snowball method. The interviewees were either suggested by gatekeepers or the previous interviewee or found by the researcher based on their qualifications. The criteria for choosing the interviewees included the wish to cover different perspectives and demographic features (newcomers/founders, male/female etc.), but also to follow the suggested sequence of partners as a representation of internally recommended perspectives. The initial preparatory interviews were not included in the final sample and served as background knowledge for the analysis. As a result, the final interview sample included 38 interviewees from different walks of life with professions such as *teacher, professor, real-estate manager, midwife, businessman, architect, biologist, urban planner, politician, engineer, journalist, seamstress, dance teacher, psychologist, student* and *retired* (for more details see Appendix 1). Out of the 38 interviewees, 20 were female and 18 male; males predominated in the sample of Transition Network (8 males, 1 female), the Let´s do it! Network was best balanced (5 males, 4 females), while females dominated in the case of GEN (11 females, 4 males) and governance (5 females, 1 male).

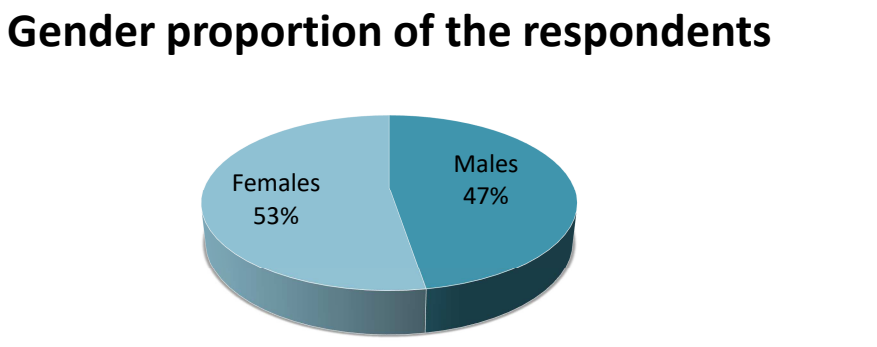



**Figure 3. Gender proportion of the respondents across sectors**

All interviews were conducted by the researcher and took place in different ways. When possible, they were made personally. Primarily due to long distances, several interviews were made using electronic means, especially in the case of expert interviews, which were short in nature and did not include the possibility or need for participant observation. Eight interviews were conducted with the help of electronic devices (three per phone, five via Skype), including four from the five expert interviews. All

GEN-related interviews were made in person during the fieldwork phases, while some interviews with representatives of Transition Town and the Let's do it! initiative were done with the help of electronic devices. After the interviews several specifications and additional questions were asked via e-mail. All interviews, except one, were recorded with the consent of the research participants. The exceptional interview not recorded was made via Skype and the answers were directly written down during the conversation. All other interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher to facilitate analysis. All the recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher as soon as possible after the interviews were conducted. The resulting texts were coded using the MaxQDA software for qualitative data analysis. MaxQDA was especially helpful for analysing (coding, memoing) the data and systematizing the results. The main benefits of using MaxQDA included the ease of retrieving and systematizing concepts, quotes, categories and memos, comparing incidents, analysing the interrelations of categories and categories and flexibility in exporting data to different formats.

The questionnaires serving as the basis for the talks were modified several times as a result of the progressing analysis according to the direction the data was indicating (examples of the questionnaires can be found in Appendix II). As a rule, the interviews started with a short explanation of the purpose of the study. Certain topics, such as the personal relationship to sustainability and perception of what it means for their organization or network; their assessment of the problems and the current status, as well as their understanding of what needs to change in the current situation to reach a more sustainable society, were thematised in each interview round, but not always in the same order or depth, and room was allowed for contextual and situational specialities. Though the possibility was offered, only a few respondents wanted to see the questionnaire beforehand, and in one case the questionnaire was shortened and altered twice before the interview upon the request of the interview partner from the governance side. Towards the end of the interview phase and in accordance with theoretical sampling the initially semi-structured interviews moved closer to a more structured interview type to saturate the categories.

**Collecting artefacts and texts.** Collecting and studying artefacts and texts produced and used by the actors was one additional way used in this research for learning about a group, its rhetoric, and practices in connection to SD. Mainly texts produced by members or employees of the selected case study groups were collected for analysis, including books, booklets, and brochures, web page contents, articles, and reviews. As no fieldwork was conducted on the governance level, more emphasis was laid on collecting of texts to build up a solid ground for the expert interviews.

**Fieldwork and participant observation.** The fieldwork phases involved observing and sometimes participating in the daily activities of people and groups in civil society case studies in different settings. Initially, I looked for a possibility to also observe the practices on the governance level, but the complexity of such endeavour including formats prescribing a yearlong waiting time and requirement of signing documents of not revealing any confidential information I might have come across would have possibly rendered the collected data unusable. Thus no fieldwork or participant observation was conducted in the case of governance institutions; instead, document analysis and expert interviews were used to gather data in these instances. Consequently, fieldwork data was collected for eight cases in three countries. Fieldnotes were recorded in each case preferably during the same, or on the following day. Fieldwork was done in all GEN and TN cases. Due to the campaign nature and time-related restrictions I was unable to participate in the Let's do it! actions in Portugal personally, but met the participating people at a different time. In most cases, a short-term (up to one week to one month) fieldwork was undertaken, and in several cases follow-up visits to the field occurred. In the German LDI process the participant observation was most intensive as in some points

of time I was involved not only as a participant, but also as a contact point helping to facilitate the development of the initative in the spirit of transdisciplinary research.

**Ethical considerations.** Whenever research was conducted with participants, they were informed about my identity as a researcher and about the research aims. During initial contact with the gatekeepers of the selected groups, the abstract of the project was sent along with an explanation of the interest to include those groups in my research. All interview partners were asked for their agreement to recording the discussion or interview and were informed about the nature of the research; all the informants gave their informed consent to participate, but no written agreements were signed.

As the opinions of respondents about being included with their actual names in a recognisable manner or being anonymised were mixed, the decision was made to represent individual respondents anonymously with acronyms. Consequently respondents, especially those representing the governance level, were able to speak more freely, trusting that their identity will not be revealed. The participants had the chance to see the manuscript before completion and publication upon request.

## 2.2.3. Analysis: from coding to theory building

**Coding.** The analysis phase consisted of different stages involving coding the collected data to generate a theory accounting for the patterns of behaviour which are relevant and problematic for those involved. After the data collection round the researcher in GT returns to analyse and code it, using insights gained from analysis process to inform the next data collection round. The aim of coding is fragmenting empirical data through to make it abstract and working with resultant codes to construct abstract categories that fit these data and offer a conceptual analysis of them. Throughout the process insights and theoretical ideas were recorded in the form of memos.

The initial open coding was an intensive and time-consuming phase analysing the data to extract a set of categories and their properties by coding for as many categories as possible without a preconceived set of codes. During the coding process of sixteen case studies, nearly 1200 open codes were produced. Next, the large code pool was condensed and densified by joining similar codes as sub-codes to categories and generating theoretical memos about their interrelations generating ideas and hypotheses. The categories were grouped in turn into related groupings, which offered new ways of seeing and understanding the phenomenon under study and supported the development of the overall theoretical framework. Once a clear pattern starts to emerge, the categories and themes are integrated in a way that articulates a coherent understanding of the phenomenon of study. This process refers to delimiting the theory to a couple of core variables which act as a guide for further data collection and analysis. Eventually, theoretical saturation was attained when no new categories or properties emerged from gathering of further data, and a limited set of core categories remained[4].

**Theory building.** In the course of research, I experienced what Strauss and Corbin suggested (1998) – that the evolution of a theory can be a daunting task as it occurs over time and requires the analyst to be immersed in the data and, prepared to return to the raw data to capture the essence of the phenomenon. Thus I started with empirical specifics and moved toward general statements about the emergent categories and relationships between them to *"address problems in specific empirical worlds and to theorize how their categories may apply to other situations"* (Charmaz 2011). The theory was built by examining the case and searching for a range of possible meanings and connections before

[4] Unlike the classical GT, the constructivist approach allows for more than once core category to explain the core behaviors of case study groups.

moving to the next case, comparing the cases and returning to it as often as needed. Thus "*our analytic grasp of the data begins to take form"* (Charmaz 2006: 3).

**Identifying core categories** and delimiting investigation around them, is central for fulfilling the goal of grounded theory research and generating a theory that accounts for the patterns of behaviour relevant or problematic for those involved. The core categories provide the key to the theory, as they account for most of the variation in pattern and behaviour, and most other categories relate to them. The core categories are the basic processes that engage actors, individuals as well as groups and institutions in a series of activities aimed at achieving more sustainable ways of life.

**Reaching theoretical saturation** is a point at which there are no new ideas and insights emerging from the data, only reoccurring patterns and strong repetition of already observed themes. The richness of the cases creates preconditions for conceptual saturation. The saturation point is entirely content dependent and presumes that a strong theoretical understanding of the researched phenomenon has emerged. Theoretical saturation is reached "when the main concern of the research can be accounted for, and further sampling fails to add significant value to the study through adding new categories or properties. At this stage, when the theory becomes dense with concepts and enriched by relevant extant literature, the researcher has "discovered" a substantive theory" (Fernández 2005: 51). Substantive theories are applicable to the particular area of empirical enquiry from which they emerged, and Glaser and Strauss have classified them as "middle-range theories" relevant to the concerned people existing between "minor working hypotheses" and "grand theories" (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

# 2.3. Overview of the sample

This subchapter explains the principles and process of forming the sample and introduces the chosen case study actors. In this section the criteria for choosing the sample as well as a concise overview of the included actors is provided. A more detailed account of the development of the individual case study units can be found in subchapter 3.3. and their sustainability-related rhetoric and practices are analysed and discussed in detail in respective sections of Chapter 4.

## 2.3.1. Criteria for choosing the sample

Sixteen actors were chosen as case study participants for this study based on the following criteria that helped to ensure sample consistency:

**1. Located in the European Union.** The EU was chosen as a geo-political framework for tracing the rhetoric and actions around sustainable development qualitatively and comparatively across regions and societal levels.

**2. (Pro)activeness in the relevant field.** Research participants were selected for their intentional and conscious, often proactive engagement with sustainability issues. This ensured that the participants had developed opinions, strategies and practices concerning this matter.

**3. Membership in an international network.** Actors participating in networks with similar goals were selected for this research over individual participants. This enabled looking at how the local context influenced their approach to sustainable development in the context of the approach of the overall network. The included nation states are members of the EU. The included civil society actors belong to the networks of the Global Ecovillage Network, the Transition Network, and the Let's do it!

Network. Among the criteria for choosing the countries was also the existence of active members from each of the three civil society networks.

**4. Inclusion of governance and civil society actors on different scales.** The EU and the civil society umbrella networks were chosen as representatives of the macro scale, the three nation-states, and the national LDI initiatives as examples of the meso scale, and the local ecovillage and transition town initiatives as examples of the micro scale.

**5. Having a model character.** The chosen actors have developed, are using and offering to others certain sustainable development related views and practices that can also be applied by other actors in different settings, giving them a model character.

**6. Being established**. All the chosen groups have been actively working in their selected field for at least three years. This ensures that they have developed a stable group, structure, idea basis and activities, which indicates their serious engagement.

## 2.3.2. The process of forming the sample

The process of forming the sample involved a number of considerations listed and explained below.

### 2.3.2.1. Focus on the North

When choosing the focus, I was often asked: why talk about sustainable development in the North, where the situation is already relatively good, should the efforts not be focused on the South instead, where the suffering resulting from unsustainable human actions is much more severe? Similar attitude could also be noticed among some of the respondents for this study. There are good grounds for such questioning; however, I also see the risk accompanying it including oversimplification, leading to discarding relevant aspects contributing to and perpetuating the current situation.

The roots of the unsustainable practices causing devastation worldwide leading to the suffering of the people in the South are still connected to the political and practical everyday choices made in the North. The business-as-usual approach in the North results in continuing depletion of natural resources, destruction of biodiversity, and spreading of cultural colonialism worldwide. This yields limited improvements in the local conditions in the South or empowerment of the local people. Instead, it tends to support the spread of consumerist mentality encouraging neglecting the old, often more autonomous and sustainable ways of living.

Talking about the need to teach sustainable development in the South is often based on the questionable underlying assumption that people in the North have more expertise than the locals in the South on what needs to be done to improve their level of well-being. Furthermore, when the North concentrates on teaching others, it tends to neglect its own cultural, social and economic sustainability issues, which are often more subtle, but are far from being solved. This is why focusing on the South does not necessarily support the pro-sustainability attempts worldwide.

A further reason for focusing on the South, also reflected in some interviews made for this study, is that it can be easier to help people in the South, who are in more direct need and thus more open to new ideas and practices than people and groups in the North. It is the experienced truth of many people active in the sustainable development field who are overwhelmed by the challenges that the unsustainable global situation poses that it is easier to help and try to change the situation in the South than back home in the North.

However, this research argues that both challenges need to be tackled in parallel – those at home and those further away. In this way, people maintain the sense of immediate responsibility and

initiative to make positive changes happen in their immediate surroundings while contributing to the improvement of the overall global situation in the long run. The need to maintain the immediate responsibility and initiative on the local scale also counts as a reason why this study also includes the empowering change-making models on the civil society level.

In short, the reasons for focusing on the North were the wish to explore more closely the claim that sustainable development is already established in the North along with the understanding that unless the roots of unsustainable behavioural patterns in the North are more clearly recognized, discussed and changed, changes in global resource circulation processes and in reaching one of the main aims of sustainable development – inter- and intragenerational equity – will remain limited. A better understanding of the situation in the North is therefore highly relevant.

#### 2.3.2.2. Focus on the European Union

The European Union (EU) forms the geographical framework for this study. The main reasons for concentrating on Europe are threefold.

First, sustainable development as an umbrella concept has largely been pioneered in and promoted by Europe for over 25 years. It is interesting to see how the sustainability scene has developed in comparison of the civil society and governance levels across the EU.

Second, all three international civil society networks chosen as case study examples have their roots in Europe and despite having grown into global networks, are still strongly represented there.

Third, as explained above, the claim that sustainable development is already mainstreamed in Europe leaves many internal inconsistencies without sufficient attention, and calls for further research. According to a recent survey (UNEP 2012), the EU shows particularly unsustainable levels of consumption, driving many global problems, providing additional justification for the choice of focus.

The European Union was also chosen as an example of a transnational actor with remarkable influence on the ways sustainable development issues are seen and put to practice in its member states. Having started from the same requirement to create national sustainable development strategies in the early 2000s, it is interesting to see how the local settings have influenced the way SD has been interpreted and implemented.

#### 2.3.2.3. Considerations concerning included countries

The case study countries were selected according to the principle of diversity and according to the opportunities presenting themselves during the fieldwork.

In terms of diversity the sample countries Estonia, Germany and Portugal form a North-East – South-West axis across Europe, representing diverse socio-cultural, historical, political, economic and environmental circumstances. Investigating sustainable development situation in these countries allows valuable insights into this diversity.

Concerning opportunities that presented themselves, Estonia was chosen as the first case study country, as I had already done related research there and it made sense to use the acquired knowledge to inform this study. Also, due to the small size of the country, it is relatively easy to access the top administrative officials, which was relevant for this study. Using this opportunity, the first expert interview serving as guidance for orientating in the field and adjusting the questionnaire for the next expert interviews, was done in Estonia. Germany was selected second because its wide-spread commitment to sustainable development issues, because it was the base country where the research was carried out, greatly facilitating accessing informants, and because in regard to diversity it was different enough in terms of location, size, and historical, socio-cultural, environmental and economic circumstances from the first case study country. Consideration of sparing use of resources also played

their part when choosing these two countries. Portugal was added to the sample as the last case study country because it fitted the diversity principle, being different enough from Estonia and Germany. Here also the opportunity played an important role, as the GEN yearly gathering took place in one of the largest European ecovillages located in Portugal at the outset of the fieldwork phase.

The rhetoric and practices of the national government level was focused on, leaving the local municipal government level out of research scope because firstly, this would have significantly increased the amount of data, and secondly, as explained in the next section, because this research aimed to give visibility also the less studied approaches of the civil society initiatives and networks.

#### 2.3.2.4. Considerations concerning the choice of civil society cases

When choosing participating civil society actors the criteria in section 2.3.1., as well as the following criteria were applied:

- is a non-profit entity;
- recognises the current critical sustainability situation;
- proposes new ways for dealing with common problems;
- functions as an educational centre by spreading practices for sustainable lifestyles;
- empowers by highlighting the role of individuals and groups in making a difference.

Consequently, three international civil society networks (Global Ecovillage Network, Transition Town Network and Let´s do it! Network), as well as nine individual initiatives from three case study countries, that had chosen to join one of these networks, were chosen to the sample.

So far, the sustainable development scene on the governance level has received much more scientific attention than the civil society scene. This study aimed to contribute to a better understanding of the sustainable development situation in Europe by collecting and analysing new data of the civil society movements in order to find differences and similarities of the governance and civil society approaches. Considering these reasons, the choice was made to include more civil society cases in the sample, as exemplified in Figure 4.

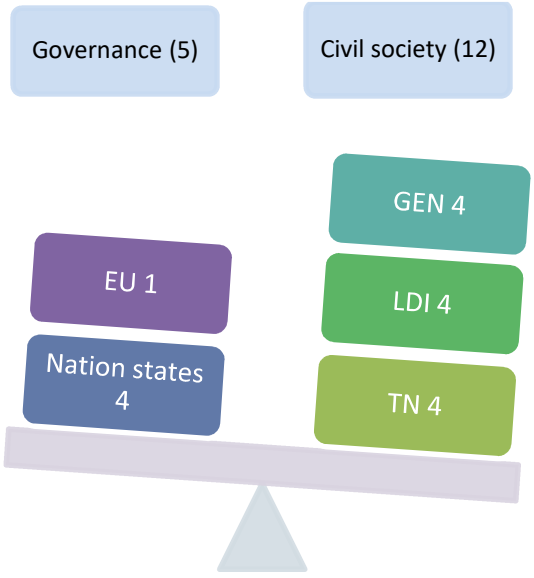



**Figure 4. Proportions of the governance and civil society participants in the case studies.**

### 2.3.3. Introduction to the case study actors

The sample includes sixteen case studies: four on the governance level and twelve on the civil society level. Figure 5 shows an overview of the research participants and their whereabouts on the EU map.

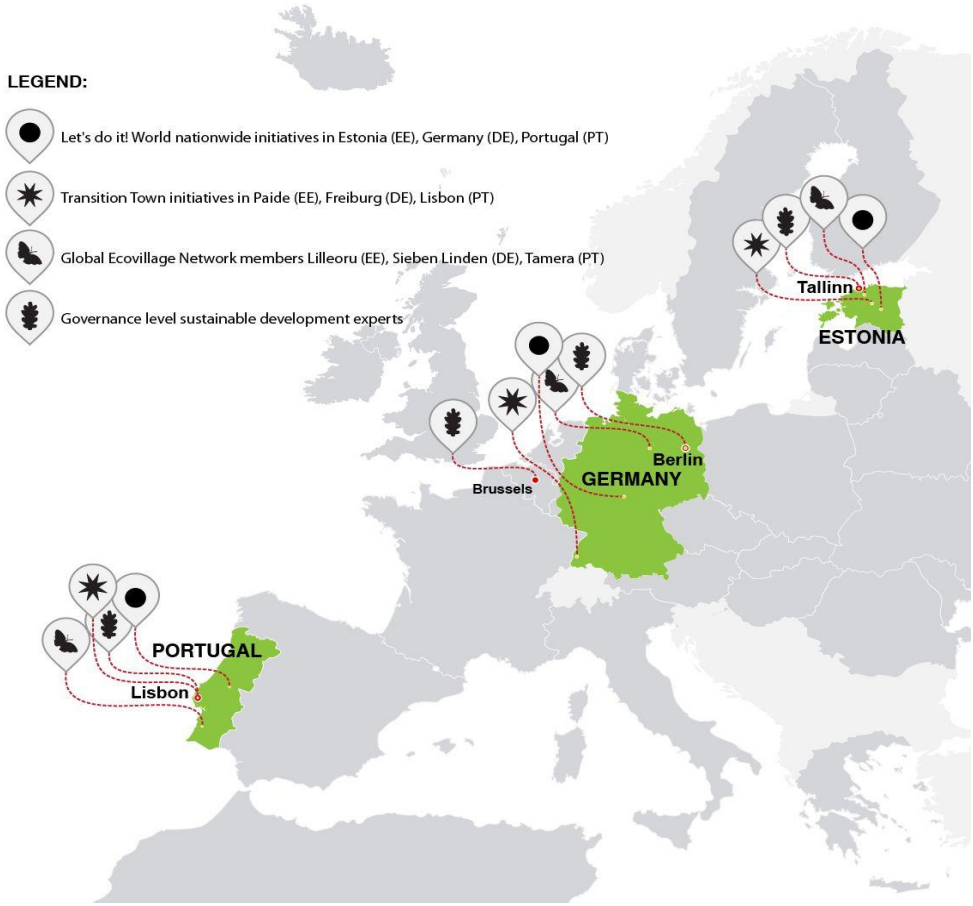



**Figure 5. A map of Europe showing the locations of the research participants.**

To ensure better readability, the introduction of the research participants follows the principle of moving from bigger and better-known entities to smaller and lesser-known groups. This means starting from the EU and nation states and moving to the civil society networks and their individual members. Table 2 provides an overview of the actors in the sample in terms of level and scale.

**Table 2. Overview of the sample according to levels from local to international.**

| Levels | Trans/international level | Local/Regional/National level |
|---|---|---|
| **Governance** | European Union | Nation states: Estonia, Germany, and Portugal |
| **Civil Society** | Global Ecovillage Network (GEN)<br>Transition Town Network (TT)<br>Let's do it! Network (LDI) | Network members from each country:<br>GEN: Lilleoru, Sieben Linden, Tamera<br>TT: Paide, Freiburg, Telheiras<br>LDI: Estonia, Germany, Portugal |

Data for the introduction stems from the respective websites of the actors (stand 2013-2014) and in the case of the governance level also from Eurostat (2013), the websites of the European Commission (2013) and CIA World Factbook (2013). At the end of each introduction of the network/union, a short overview table is provided. More details about each case study actor can be found in Chapters 3 and 4.

### 2.3.3.1. Governance actors in the sample

The governance actors in the sample include individual case study countries Estonia, Germany and Portugal, as well as the European Union as the entity framing this research geo-politically. The

selected case study countries reflect the diversity and different circumstances of the EU member states very well in terms of population, area and geographical location including Estonia as a small country from North-Eastern Europe, Portugal as a medium sized country from South-Western Europe and Germany as a large country from Central Europe. The EU population is 506 million, from which Germany as the largest country has 82 million, Portugal 10.6 million and Estonia only 1.3 million inhabitants (CIA World Factbook 2013). Despite the population Portuguese is the most spoken language with 210 million speakers worldwide, whereas Estonian is the smallest with only 1.1 million speakers. Also in terms of area, Germany is significantly larger than Portugal and Estonia. Whereas Germany was in 1952 among the founding members of union currently know as the EU, Portugal joined in the third round in 1986 and Estonia in the fifth round in 2004. In terms of quality of life, the life expectancy at birth in Estonia is the shortest, showing Soviet legacy with only 74.07 years, whereas Germany with 80.44 years slightly exceeded the EU average of 79.86 years (2013 est.).

The EU expert interview was conducted with a senior impact assessment and evaluation officer from the European Commission's Directorate-General for the Environment (DG Environment). The DG Environment was suggested by a number of gatekeepers in the EU administrative system as the key partner for SD issues. A number of EU documents were analysed for understanding the scope and background of the SD processes in Europe, but only the documents produced by the EU explicitly tackling SD issues, especially the EU Sustainable Development Strategy "A Sustainable Europe for a Better World: A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development" (EU SDS, 2001) and its later monitoring reports and reviews (e.g. Eurostat 2009, European Commission 2009), as well as relevant website contents were included in the final sample.

The next sample in size was that of the Federal Republic of Germany. Germany was the most active country in the sample, issuing more reviews and reports of their national SD strategy "Perspectives for Germany. Our Strategy for Sustainable Development" (2002) than the other participants. The sample also included relevant web contents of relevant governance structures. The expert interview was conducted with a leading strategy official from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, suggested by a number of gatekeepers from the governance structures.

The sample of the Republic of Estonia included the Estonian National Sustainable Development Strategy „Sustainable Estonia 21" (2006), as well as the later monitoring reports and the web page contents relating to SD of the Ministry of Environment and the Strategy Unit of the Government Office, which are in charge of SD matters in Estonia. Two expert interviews were conducted: the first interview was carried out with an adviser to the Ministry of Environment and was used to test the questionnaire. The second expert interview was made with the adviser to the Strategy Unit of the Government Office, responsible for coordinating the SD matters in Estonia.

The Portuguese sample had the smallest volume, which had to do with the fact that there were very limited translations of the Portuguese sustainable development efforts available in English. The sample included the Portuguese National Sustainable Development Strategy "Estratégia nacional de desenvolviemento sustentavel ENDS 2015" (2006), which was specifically translated for this analysis, as well as some secondary materials available in English and the expert interview made with a leading strategy officer from the Portuguese Environment Agency.

#### 2.3.3.2. Civil society actors in the sample

The civil society sample consisted from twelve actors: three umbrella networks and nine individual initiatives. The overview starts with the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), the oldest of the three

networks, followed by the Transition Network (TN) and the Let's do it! Network (LDIN). From each network three case studies were selected, one from each country in the sample. Table 3 gives an overview of the civil society actors in the sample by country and network affiliation.

**Table 3. Overview of the civil society actors in the sample.**

| Movement/Country | Estonia | Germany | Portugal |
|---|---|---|---|
| **GEN-E** | Lilleoru | Sieben Linden | Tamera |
| **TN** | Paide | Freiburg | Telheiras |
| **LDIN** | Teeme Ära! | LDI Germany | Amo Portugal |

All three networks stem from Europe and provide examples of solution-orientated bottom-up initiatives. These networks reflect the diversity of civil society initiatives working for solutions for a more sustainable ways of life in urban as well as rural circumstances. They all started with a few people with a vision and grew in a relatively short time to networks uniting hundreds of groups and thousands of people across Europe and worldwide. Information

**Global Ecovillage Network Europe.** As described in more detail in Chapter 3, the GEN movement started in 1995 in Denmark. GEN International supports the network's global agenda internationally, coordinates the worldwide activities, and assist in gaining exposure and momentum. This research focuses on the Global Ecovillage Network Europe (GEN-E), which is a part of the GEN International next to GEN-Africa, the Council of the Americas Sustainable Settlements (CASA), GEN North America (GENNA) and GEN Oceania & Asia (GENOA). The GEN-Europe umbrella network formed the broader framework, while the three established ecovillages from three case study countries – Lilleoru from Estonia, Sieben Linden from Germany, and Tamera from Portugal – complete the sample. Table 4 provides a concise overview of the the three case study groups from GEN-E.

**Table 4. Overview of the individual case studies of the GEN-Europe members.**

| GEN | Lilleoru | Sieben Linden | Tamera |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning** | 1993 (group started in 1992) | 1997 (group started in 1991) | 1995 (group started in 1978) |
| **Location and area** | Northern Estonia, Harjumaa, Aruvalla; 20 ha | Northern Germany, Sachsen-Anhalt, Beetzendorf; 81 ha | Southern Portugal, Colos, Monte Cerro; 134 ha |
| **Participants** | 110 members plus children | 120 inhabitants plus children | 120 collaborators plus children |

All three individual case study units can be described as rural intentional communities created in the early 1990s. They have developed to educational centres on an international scale and joined GEN later along the way on the basis of similar core goals and values. All initiatives concentrate their efforts to raising awareness about the way we live and impact our surroundings. Although they have different focus points, they all serve as practical lived sustainability centres. The amount of people directly involved as members, inhabitants or collaborators, is approximately similar.

**Transition network**. This network started in 2005 in the UK under the name of Transition Town and has grown rapidly since 2006. At the time of data collection the Transition network (TN) listed 1130 registered initiatives, including 462 official initiatives and 654 muller (candidate) initiatives in 43 countries (Transition network 2013a). In addition to the umbrella TN one initiative from each case study country was included in the sample: Wabalinn Paide from Estonia, Transition Freiburg from Germany, and Transition Telheiras from Portugal. The cities where the initiatives are located are quite different: Paide is a small town in Estonia with roughly 10 000 inhabitants; Freiburg is a bigger city in Germany with ca 230 000 people, whereas Telheiras is a district of Lisbon, the capital of Portugal,

which has over 500 000 inhabitants. Despite the size of the town or city, all received the city rights between 12th-13th centuries: Freiburg 1120, Lisbon 1256 and Tallinn 1291. All initiatives are local urban initiatives joining active citizens interested in sustainability transition and revival of local community. Table 5 sums up the first facts on individual case study initiatives.

**Table 5. Overview of the individual case studies of the Transition network.**

| TT | Wabalinn Paide | Transition Town Freiburg | Transição Telheiras |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Location** | Central Estonia | South-Western Germany | Central coastal Portugal |
| **Beginning** | 2003 | 2010 | 2010 |
| **Involved ca.** | 25 | 600 | 25 |

At the time of research, all initiatives were in different phases: Freiburg became an official initiative (Transition Town Freiburg 2011, 2013), Telheiras was continuously a candidate (Transition Telheiras 2013) and Paide had no plans of becoming a member (Wabalinn Paide 2013).

**Let's do it! Network**. The idea was born in Estonia in 2007 and since 2008 the network has been growing. By 2014 there were 112 countries that had joined the network with 198 cleanups done by 10 million volunteers (Let´s do it world 2014). The sample included the umbrella organization as well as three local Let's do it! initiatives in Estonia, Germany and Portugal. Table 6 provides a short overview.

**Table 6. Overview of individual case study groups belonging to the Let's do it! network.**

| LDI | LDI Estonia | Let's do it Germany | Limpar Portugal |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Team** | Teeme Ära talgupäev/ LDI Estonia | Let's do it! Germany/ LDI Germany | Associação Mãos à Obra Portugal (AMO Portugal) |
| **Active** | Since 2007 (preparations)/2008 | 2011 (preparations) to 2013 | Active 2010-2013 |
| **Involved** | Over 160 000 | About 250 | Over 108 000 |

The LDI groups are mostly campaign-based, coming together once a year to organise and participate in the cleanup (e.g. German and Portuguese groups), but there were also more stable citizen groups in some countries (e.g. in Estonia). At the time of research, the groups had managed to involve a different amount of participants – from 250 in Germany to over 160 000 in Estonia.

Table 7 summarises the civil society sample in terms of beginning of the networks, their members and the individual case study initiatives belonging to the sample.

**Table 7. Overview of the civil society actors in the sample.**

| Name | Global Ecovillage Network | Transition network | Let's Do It! Network |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Began** | 1995 (in Denmark)/1996 | 2005/2006 (in the UK) | 2007 (in Estonia) |
| **Members** | GEN had 501 member communities worldwide; the GEN-Europe had 214 members. | 1130 initiatives registered, 462 official initiatives, 654 mullers in 43 countries. | 107 countries, 139 cleanups, and 8 million volunteers |
| **Sample** | GEN-Europe<br>Lilleoru in Estonia (EE)<br>Sieben Linden in Germany (DE)<br>Tamera in Portugal (PT) | Transition Network<br>Wabalinn Paide, EE<br>Transition Freiburg, DE<br>Transition Telheiras, PT | Let´s do it!<br>Teeme Ära! EE<br>Let's do it! Germany<br>Limpar (later Amo) Portugal |

# 2.4. Research material

As shortly described in subchapter 2.3.3.3., the data consisted of different types of information which can be divided into primary and secondary data. The primary data, making up the main bulk, consisted of various documents, interview transcripts, field notes, and memos. Secondary data, consisting mainly of texts written about the groups by third parties and theoretical analysis of related fields, was included additionally in a later phase. This research was informed by the following types of data:

**1) Memos.** The writing of memos started before coding at the outset of the research process by recording prior ideas and research hypotheses and continued throughout the research process. Altogether 150 memos were written for this research, amassing 270 pages.

**2) Field notes**. Field notes were written during the fieldwork at the civil society groups. 85 pages of notes were written and used for analysis.

**3) Interviews.** From spring 2011 to summer 2013 thirty interviews were made for this research. There were three main types: preparatory interviews with gatekeepers, semi-structured qualitative interviews with civil society stakeholders and expert interviews with governance experts. The length of the interviews differed with the first two being between 2 and 1,5 hours and the latter between 30 minutes and 1 hour. After transcription, the volume of interview data amasses 125 pages.

**4) Documents.** Mainly documents produced by the actors were used, secondary document sources to a lesser degree. Three main types of documents included: strategy documents produced by both civil society and governance actors (i.e. the national sustainable development strategies or the transition initiative primer); review texts (i.e. the EU SD review from 2006/9 or articles written by the actors) and self-representations (text produced by the actors such as the web page contents or booklets). The documents used to inform this analysis are mainly listed in subchapter 3.4. The documents section also included audio and video files, which were not transcribed and are in the possession of the author.

**5) Secondary data sources.** As main secondary data sources, texts and analytical/theoretical approaches produced about the actors as well as existing research in related fields were included. Also, books produced by the actors were included as background data, as their inclusion in primary data would have increased the volume of data too exessively, and only some actors have produced books (e.g. GEN and TN), while others only offer data, which was included as primary research material e.g. LDI). Thus this choice was made both for the sake of greater uniformity of data, and more manageable data volumes.

Table 8 sums up the research materials including estimated volume and types of data.

**Table 8. Overview of the data including approximate volume and types of data.**

| Data type | Units | Volume |
|---|---|---|
| **Memos** | 150 | 270 pages |
| **Field notes** | 12 | 85 pages |
| **Interviews** | 37 | 38h and 34m (2314 minutes) |
| **Primary data** | Subchapter 3.3 gives an overview of data informing the analysis as primary data. | |
| **Secondary data** | Secondary data sources are referred to in Chapters 3 and 5, also listed bibliography. | |

# CHAPTER 3

# DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCENE

This chapter outlines the emergence of the sustainability concern in the West and elaborates on the respective developments of the case study groups. This preliminary analysis introduces the relevant strands of thought to understand better the case study groups and serves as preparation for further analysis grounding the discussion. The selection of information rests on its relevance for understanding the different perspectives of research participants to the current crisis and touches upon their historical and conceptual development.

The first subchapter outlines some of the key processes leading to the rise of environmental concern to the public spotlight in the West in the 20th century. Here the forerunners and key themes of raising environmental awareness are discussed, followed by the shift in rhetoric from talking about "nature" to talking about "environment". After that the rise of the environmental movement is elaborated on, followed by periodization of the rise of environmental concern until the early 1990s. The second subchapter discusses the emergence of the sustainability scene including the development of the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development. Subsequently, different SD models are discussed, pointing out their open, conventional nature; and an overview of research topics and trends in sustainability studies is given to contextualise how SD is understood and used. The chapter ends with an analysis of the development and characteristics of the case study actors, serving as preparation for Chapter 4 focused on their current SD rhetoric and practices.

## 3.1. Rise of the environmental concern in the North

Sustainable development might be a new concept, but the need for balancing human ways of life with nature's capacity to regenerate, cope and adapt is not new. Different sources trace collective human efforts to shape and control nature, occasionally leading to severe environmental degradation, back for about 8000-15 000 years. The resulting pollution and environmental degradation even toppled a few great civilizations like Mesopotamia, where a poorly designed irrigation system slowly poisoned the land with salt, or the Easter Island, where neglect of resource limits led to their depletion and societal downfall (Ponting 1991, Assadourian and Prugh 2003, Diamond 2005). Political scientist Peter Dauvergne suggests that such balancing efforts extend back to when nomadic hunters and gatherers were allowing animals and plants to regenerate, settled indigenous communities developed cultural practices of living within nature, and ancient Greek and Roman philosophers were reflecting on the consequences of different political and social orders for the natural world (Dauvergne 2009: xliii).

However, until some 200-300 years ago, human-inflicted environmental problems were primarily local, or at worst, regional. Human activities started to cause noticeable global environmental damage since the industrial revolution, accompanied and partly caused by a significant increase in using coal and other fossil fuels. Another reason for the internationalization of environmental degradation was the growing population, jumping from 1 billion in the early 1800s to over 2 billion by the end of the 1920s. The rising consumption of natural resources from places far from producers and consumers, enabled by colonial systems, also played its part. By the turn of the 17th and 18th century, various scholars and state officials were calling for greater efforts to preserve, conserve, and manage natural systems (Carlowitz 2000, Sebaldt 2002). By the turn of the 20th century, the increasing industrial production, consumption of natural resources and growing population

motivated more and more governments to implement stricter resource management rules to lessen unwanted consequences such as soil erosion, flooding, unsanitary conditions and declining air quality in industrializing cities (Dauvergne 2009). Many private persons and associations began to advocate for measures to preserve the countryside and nature, for example by establishing national parks to preserve scenic beauty and species for viewing or hunting in natural settings. The first governments were starting to respond to the situation by passing new national and regional policies to promote conservation of wildlife and better resource management.

The following subchapters introduce some of the key topics and forerunners of raising environmental awareness, dwell on the relevance of the shift from talking about nature to talking about environment, and offer a periodization of the waves of environmental concern.

### 3.1.1. Key themes and forerunners of raising environmental awareness

The environmental concern and awareness were informed and fortified by numerous authors with different backgrounds. These authors often witnessed the results of the rapidly expanding science-technology culture first-hand, prompting their reflection and responses. Depending on various strands of thought, fairly different names and texts are cited as pioneers of the modern Western environmental thought. The rise of the environmental concern is frequently traced back to the 1960s (e.g. Staggenborg 2007, Keskpaik 2008, Allaste 2011). For the current research, an overview reaching further back is of use, however, helping to understand the logic of the emerging metanarratives more clearly. Below some of the key issues and their proponents of relevance for the current thesis are introduced.

**Limits to growth**. Dealing with limited resources in the context of a growing population has become one of the central issues in the 21st-century sustainability debate. The issue was prominently raised by Thomas Malthus in his influential "An essay on the principle of population" from 1798 discussing the ability of the earth to sustain its growing population. He predicted that a worldwide famine would one day ensue because population, left unchecked, rises exponentially while food production (and other resources) can only increase arithmetically (Malthus 1798). The Malthusian approach has been widely used in ecology, including the terminology of carrying capacity, implying that an ecological system can only carry a critical limit, and overshooting this limit results in overuse of resources and eventual collapse of the population.

In the late 1960s, the "limits to growth" line of reasoning was continued by Garrett Hardin and Paul Ehrlich. Discussing the problem of responsibility in the context of overuse of natural resources, Hardin's article "The Tragedy of the Commons" from 1968 has become one of the most cited academic articles of all time. Hardin highlighted the need for a moral stance to maintain public resources and argued that technological advances were no longer enough. The "tragedy of the commons" evolves when individuals use a public good without paying the full cost of it. He used the example of a pasture in which several farmers can graze their cattle: each individual seeks to maximise their individual utility, while not paying the full cost. As individuals, the best way to maximise utility is to use as much of the public good as possible, but when each individual pursues this strategy, the finite public good is eventually used up. The article highlights the need for the society to educate its citizens in the morals of sustaining their environments, as it is no longer sufficient to rely on technological advances to provide indefinitely for the future. Also in 1968, Paul and Anne Ehrlich's influential book "The Population Bomb" about the growth issue was published. Ehrlich used a metaphor of the earth bombed by an exploding human population, leaving it unable to feed the starving survivors.

This line of reasoning was continued in the early 1970s in three highly influential texts: "The Limits to Growth" (1972) by Donella and Dennis Meadows, Jörgen Randers, and William Behrens III; "Small Is Beautiful" (1973) by E.F.Schumacher; and "Towards a Steady State Economy" (1973) by Herman E. Daly. The authors of "The Limits to Growth" used the then ground-breaking computer simulations to argue that economies would one day crash due to earth's finite resources, sparking controversy while also motivating many people to question the value of unrestrained economic growth. "Small Is Beautiful" by Schumacher took these critiques further and proposed reforming the global economy to decentralize and democratize decision making. In "Towards a Steady State Economy" Daly presented an alternative called the "steady state economy" for addressing environmental concerns. His text counted as a foundational text for the emerging field of ecological economics and added a significant contribution to the emerging vision on how to manage economic life more sustainably. The "limits to growth" line of reasoning has continued to date, for instance informing the more recent degrowth movement, with representatives like Noam Chomsky and Vandana Shiva. The degrowth movement, in turn, has commonalities with the voluntary simplicity and relocalisation movements, discussed in later chapters.

**Questioning the supremacy of human progress and defending the intrinsic value of nature.** Many of the later environmental thinkers have been influenced by the 19th-century American philosopher Henry David Thoreau. Especially his pivotal book "Walden: or, Life in the Woods" from 1854, opposing the promising ideas of progress, has been highly influential. Counting as one of the forefathers of modern environmental philosophy and ethics, he questioned the supremacy of humans and their modern lifestyle. His anti-progress attitude has sparked much controversy, well characterized by a quote by his contemporary poet John Greenleaf Whittier: "*Thoreau's Walden is a capital reading, but very wicked and heathenish... After all, for me, I prefer walking on two legs*" (Wagenknecht 1967: 112). Updike finds that even today "Walden" hasn't lost its controversial influence, being revered by academics, politicians, as well as grassroots groups with preservationist, back-to-nature, anarchist and civil-disobedience mindsets (Updike 2004). It has been estimated that Thoreau expressed one of the central axioms of the modern conservation movement when he wrote: *"…in Wildness is the preservation of the World"* (Thoreau 1861).

This line of reasoning was continued by another influential American environmental thinker, the conservationist Aldo Leopold, hailed as the founder of contemporary environmental ethics (e.g. Callicot 1987). Leopold's book "A Sand County Almanac", published in 1949, and especially his essay "Land Ethics" in that book, continued Thoreau's rhetoric in seeing nature as intrinsically valuable. Leopold summarized this standpoint by stating:

> *"A land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such"* (Leopold 1992: 151).

Thoreau´s and Leopold´s views strongly influenced the emerging global environmental movement. Their line of reasoning echoes that of many indigenous nations and groups worldwide. The writings of Arne Naess and Joanna Macy from the deep ecology movement and Bill Mollison, David Holmgren and Rob Hopkins from the permaculture movement[5] follow similar lines, informing the positions of several networks in the sample, especially the Transition network and the Global Ecovillage Network.

**Dealing with human-induced impacts like pollution.** Even though the roots of ecology can be traced back to the Greeks, it was Ernst Haeckel in 1866 who first defined a need for a discipline he called

[5] Permaculture is a holistic ecological design system for sustainability, based on the principle that multi-layered systems are more resilient. See also Mollison 1990, Holmgren 2002, Hopkins 2010, 2011a, 2011b.

*oecologie* describing the relationships between organisms and their surrounding environments. At the turn of the 20th century, Ellen Swallow Richards developed Haeckel's ideas further, introducing *human ecology*. Richards also differed from her many colleagues in ecology before 1900 in that she was interested in studying the relationships of the organisms and environment in big cities, which were already then characterised by air and water pollution (Richardson 2002). Other relevant names in human ecology-related research include Gregory Bateson, especially his "The Pattern Which Connects" from 1978, and D. W. Orr, especially his "Ecological Literacy" from 1991.

Human ecology has close links with sociology, especially environmental sociology. Sociology developed in a context where biological determinism had failed to fully explain key features of social change and the human-nature relationships. Environmental sociology started to emerge after the activation of the environmental movement in the early 1970s, encouraged by the works of William R. Catton, Jr. and Riley Dunlap. They challenged the constricted anthropocentrism of classical sociology and called for a new holistic, or systems perspective (Dunlap, Catton 1979). Especially since the 1990s the environmental sociology has been established as a respected interdisciplinary field of study.

**Christian and capitalist mind-sets as causes for the current crisis.** Max Weber's pioneering work on capitalism and its results on environment, and on protestant ethics and its effects on the use of natural resources, have had significant impact, as the works of Robert E. Park and Ernest Burgess from the Chicago School. Park and Burgess´s were closely connected to human ecology (Park and Burgess 1972). They used their concept *household of nature* and were inspired by the idea of studying successive processes and competition patterns as a good basis for investigating society (Gross 2011: 10). Their co-authored book "Introduction to the Science of Sociology" from 1921 helped to pave the way for the new wave of environmental research in social sciences, which began during the 1960s.

Another strand influential in the context of the later discussion of the grassroots and governance approaches to sustainable development is offered by the American historian Lynn Townsend White Jr. In his seminal article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" (1967) he traced the reasons for environmental degradation, inspiring the disciplines of environmental history and eco-theology. White argued that even though we know very little about the real causes and effects of environmental change throughout the history (the historical research was only just beginning), worries about the backlash of the approaching ecological crisis were growing feverishly on the threshold of the last third of the 20th century (White 2008: 38). Similarly to Weber, White saw the relevance of capitalist and Christian mind-sets to ecological problems, which started to surface more intensively during their lifetime. White concluded that the deeper causes of contemporary environmental problems lay in a historically developed worldview of the industrialised North (Keskpaik 2008: 15).

Before proceeding to an overview of the development of the sustainability scene, a reflection on the effects of the shift from talking about "nature" to talking about "environment", relevant in the context of this research, deserves attention.

## 3.1.2. Shift in the rhetoric from nature to environment

Even though humans live in the midst of nature, and are themselves a phenomenon of nature, the view of being distinct from it has become dominant in the West. A gradual shift occurred in the mid-20th century from talking about "nature" to talking about the "environment". Rather than just a change of single expressions in different languages[6], this shift also reflects a change in the way people in the

[6] The semantic shift took place also in the three other languages used in this research next to English (Estonian, German and Portuguese).

West relate to their surroundings. Similarly to the SD concept also the concept of environment has very different interpretations. Some understand environment as the earth that needs to be protected from the growing number of polluting people. For others, it is more about the air in towns and cities, the garbage on the streets, the diseases in polluted cities, the sewage or industrial poisons in wells, lakes or seas. Thus, "managing" the environment is more about making the spaces where people reside cleaner, safer, and more pleasant; preserving "natural" beauty for hikers and birdwatchers; and ensuring efficient economic growth resources for future generations" (Environmnetalism 2013).

Etymologically, the English word *nature* stems from the Latin *natura,* meaning "natural character, course of things" (Etymology Online 2011). While nature also encompasses the internal cause and character, the much younger concept *environment* tends to signify the external conditions or surroundings where people live or work – the state of being environed: encirclement (Online Etymology Dictionary 2011). This observation is supported by literary scholar Leo Spitzer who argues that the English word environment was first used in an article by Thomas Carlyle on J. W. Goethe published in the collection "Miscellanies" in 1827 to translate the German word *Umgebung* (Spitzer 1942: 205). Spitzer claims that while the German expression signified both the material (outer, visible) as well as the spiritual (inner, invisible) surrounding, these aspects were lost in translation (Spitzer 1942: 204-206).

A review of related documents, and of organisations and institutions active in this field makes apparent that a shift from talking about nature to talking about environment took place in the second half of the 20th century. In a specialized ecological sense, the word *environment* was first used as late as 1956 (Online Etymology Dictionary 2011) when the idea of global environment began to emerge. Dauvergne comments:

> *"..the word environment only began to take on its more modern political, social, ecological, and global meaning during the 1960s and early 1970s, as public demands for cleaner and safer living conditions became more vocal, as newly formed non-governmental groups began to lobby governments and campaign to influence consumers and corporations, and as global-scale problems began to move up national and international political agendas"* (2009: xliii-xliv).

These processes were reinforced by the striking images of the planet Earth the astronauts took from space, especially the blue marble image from 1972 that soon became to symbolise the global environmentalism.

Speaking about the consequences of this rhetoric shift, the philosopher Jaan Kaplinski considers the resulting anthropocentrism almost inevitable (Kaplinski 2003: 9). He argues that for our ancestors in pre-Christian times nature primarily meant a self-organising system, which people were a part of. Nature does not have a centre in such a traditional mind-set, and it was paramount for survival to understand and follow its rules. Kaplinski argues that environment, on the other hand, has a centre – the living being that is environed, about whose environment we are talking. As humans, we primarily talk about our own environment, of which we are the centre: *"The more we talk about the environment instead of nature, the more we emphasise – willingly or unwillingly – that we are in the centre of this environment. This emphasis does not help us in reflecting on our place in the big natural system"* (Kaplinski 2003: 9, K. Tamm's translation from Estonian). Kaplinski observes that species-centeredness in nature is natural: the predator does not care about its prey, neither does a cow that crushes bird nests on its way over the grassland. Today, the dichotomy discussed by Kaplinski is going strong, as discussed in later chapters.

Historian Hayden White suggests that Christianity's victory over paganism, which saw all natural objects as animated and revered, substantially lessened respect towards nature and created grounds for the development of a uniquely anthropocentric utilitarian approach to nature common to the Western world since the Middle Age. This change he describes as the greatest psychological

revolution of our culture (White 2008: 43). According to White the novel "marriage" between science and technology, made in ca 1850 in the Western Europe and Northern America, created a new approach to our natural environment. White locates the roots of the environmental crisis in the change of relationships between man and nature created by the Christian culture: whereas in other religions human beings are rarely seen as separate and higher compared to the rest of nature, this is the case in Roman Catholic Christianity and its offspring (White 2008). White considers that within a mere century, carried by significant technical innovations, humans have significantly changed the environment: ever-growing human population has resulted in extensive deforestation for commodities and food production, burning fossil fuels has changed the chemical structure of the atmosphere, the amounts of polluted water and trash have created new unusable and toxic landscapes. In short, White sees that the ecological crisis is the result of an emerging, entirely new culture, and the main question is, if it is able to survive its own influence. Although the 20th century has often been described as post-Christian, White considered the thought and language patterns creating respective behaviours still largely the same as during the last 1700 years (White 2008: 44). Combining the unprecedented anthropocentrism with the understanding of linear time and constant progress, unknown in previous times, White evaluates that despite Copernicus the cosmos still revolves around our little planet for the "developed West". In conclusion, White doubts if more of the same approach, i.e. more technology and more science, will help us find a way out of this complex situation. According to him the way out is in adopting a new set of basic values, a new paradigm, or a new religion, which would cast aside the often implicit, but continuously underlying assumption that the value of nature depends on its use value to human beings. Unless that happens, he considers the survival of the democratic culture highly unlikely (White 2008: 37).

### 3.1.3. Emergence of the contemporary environmental movement

In the vein of 19th-century liberalism, many governments had the idea that they should not interfere and let free enterprise do what was needed. This idea was more and more abandoned at the beginning of the 20th century, to combat problems of urbanization, infrastructure development, and agricultural crisis. For the sake of nature conservation, however, many governments continued not to interfere (Jongman 1995: 170). The predecessors of contemporary environmental organizations in the industrialized countries were the largely civil initiative based nature protection and conservation organizations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Markham 2011: 585). The apparent controversy between loss of nature and the increasing appreciation of its beauty created the basis for such organizations (Jongman 1995: 170), primarily interested in protecting the species and landscapes for human use. Next to general nature protection and conservation organizations like the Sierra Club in the United States, the Bund Naturschutz in Bayern in Germany, or the Swedish Naturskyddsföreningen, organizations with a more special focus like the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the United Kingdom, the Bund für Vogelschutz in Deutschland in Germany, or the Audubon Society in the United States, were active as civil initiatives.

Internationalisation and networking among nature protection organisations started at the outset of the 20th century (Markham 2011: 586). However, cooperation before the Second World War remained limited. With the exception of Germany, neither national governments nor the wider public supported such groups between the two World Wars (Markham 2011: 585-6). Immediately after the Second World War, nature conservation restarted its activities on international level (Jongman 1995: 171, Markham 2011: 585). Jongman connects the restart of conservation activities with the fact that in the northern states of Europe, the decline of nature was alarming after the Second World War and the awareness of what was going on was growing strongly (1995: 171). The founding of the International

Union for the Protection of Nature in 1948 (IUPN, since 1956 IUCN) marked the starting point of scientifically informed international nature protection.

Among citizens concern over deteriorating local and global environmental conditions began to increase in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A highly visible expression of this process was the celebration of the first Earth Day in April 1970, with about 20 million people rallying at one of the largest organized demonstrations in the United States to date (Dauvergne2009: liii-liv). An increasing number of environmental activists were creating national and transnational organizations to lobby governments and corporations, and rally public support. Many new environmental protection organizations were created, including the currently prominent actors such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF, later the World Wide Fund for Nature) in 1961, the Friends of the Earth (FoE), founded in 1969 in the Unites States as a more radical version of the Sierra Club, or Greenpeace, founded in 1971 as an offspring from protests of Canadians against US nuclear tests in Alaska[7]. Supported by the rising public pressure, governments took to their responsibilities and in the 1960s and 1970s nature conservation acts started to be passed or revised in numerous parliaments (Jongman 1995: 170). As the result of the activation of the environmental movement in the 1970s and 1980s many regional nature protection organizations became nation-wide (for example the German Bund Naturschutz became Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland) and most nature protection organisations broadened their goals and added new agendas, such as air and water pollution, energy and transport issues, population growth, or resource use. Markham argues that at the height of mobilisation of the environmental awareness from the late 1960s to 1980s, both old and new environmentally-oriented organisations took over goals articulated and methods used by other social movements, and that all civil society movements won from this activation wave (2011: 589). The wave started to subside in the 1990s, partly because many goals had been at least partly addressed or attained, for example, environmental policy had become an important topic in almost all industrial countries, and governments and economies were making first attempts to at least look greener. A further reason is that over time the bulk of environmental organisations became increasingly institutionalised to be taken as legitimate negotiation partners, after realising that being less confrontational and more prone to compromise offered more chances for negotiating with governments, economies and other relevant stakeholders (Markham 2011: 589). This trend towards more cooperation has continued. Referring to the end of the 1990s and early 2000nds Dauvergne finds that more environmental activists have been cooperating with governments to achieve mutual goals, bringing the WWF partnering up with companies and businesses as a good example, and predicting an increase in private contributions (2009: lvi). Dauvergne assesses that since the 1980s the capacity of environmental activists to influence governments, public attitudes, and corporations has continued to expand (2009: lv).

This new cooperative strategy has not been accepted by all – Greenpeace and FoE are continually confrontational environmental organisations. Dauvergne argues (Dauvergne 2009: lvii):

> *"The partnering of some NGOs with governments and firms does not mean activists are no longer challenging from the periphery of power. If anything, there are more activists than ever before, in part because the Internet allows for a cheap and easy global presence. Still, the trend in recent years has been toward more partnerships and a more commercial focus to all environmentalism".*

In addition to big cooperative or non-cooperative environmental organizations, there are numerous smaller, often informal environmental groups and networks, which are dedicated mostly to environmental issues on the local levels. Today thousands of groups – big and small – form networks advocating change. Innovative NGO's like Adbusters practice *culture jamming* and encourage to

[7] Today WWF, FoE and Greenpeace have millions of supporters and count as big multinational players (Dauvergne 2009: lvi).

reduce consumption, and grassroots groups like the Green Belt Movement in Kenya or the Let's do it! Network are inviting people to make specific changes to improve the situation. Such movements are often born to address and counteract certain specific local dangers, and are sometimes called "not in my backyard" (NIMBY) groups. They tend to value grassroots democracy, try to avoid bureaucracy, centralised management and becoming formal organisations, and prefer staying network-like, keeping the number of employed personnel minimal. Several researchers point out that such groups and networks uniting them tend to be short-lived, dissolving and disappearing after their goal has been reached or the cause has been lost (Staggenborg 2007, Markham 2011). The anti-nuclear movement in Germany and the United States is usually mentioned as an example here, and the environmental justice movement is also often carried by similar networks. The civil society groups chosen for this study represent such smaller more recent initiatives with a network character. However, with over 20 years on their backs, they are not short-lived, and have grown out of the initial NIMBY sentiments into being located somewhere between the protest and the cooperative approach.

Environmental decisions are increasingly made on the international level by transnational actors such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, International Whaling Commission, World Business Council on Sustainable Development, or the European Union. It is considered (e.g. Markham 2011, Roose 2002) that the EU has more influence on its member states than any other international governmental organization, which makes studying its rhetoric and actions in planning an environmentally sound, and furthermore, sustainable future especially interesting and relevant.

## 3.1.4. Waves of raising environmental awareness in the 20th century

To sum up the previous discussion, an outline of the waves of raising environmental awareness is provided below to provide a context for the following chapters. Depending on the perspective of the researcher, the emergence of environmental concern from margins to the spotlight of public and political attention has been divided mostly into two or three periods. For an overview of existing periodisations see for example Mol 1997, Buttel and Taylor 1992, Dodds 2012, Egelston 2012. The periodisation below divides this process into three waves from the early 20$^{th}$ century to the early 1990s, when the sustainable development concept started to gain relevance.

**1. The first, long wave of raising environmental awareness lasted roughly until the 1960s.**
Prompted by the increasingly evident natural degradation, this phase focused on the themes of nature protection and conservation. The once abundant species were brought to (near) extinction – like the passenger pigeon that went extinct in 1914. Supported by the developing mass media, various man-made disasters and pollution issues started to become prominent, such as nuclear testing, bombings and accidents starting in mid-1940s, smog in cities becoming thick enough to kill, like in London in December 1952, when the killer fog contributed to nearly 7000 deaths, industrial poisoning instances such as the Minamata disease in Japan caused by a massive mercury poisoning in 1956, or serious oils spills in Torrey Canyon, UK and Santa Barbara, US in the 1960s. As a response, core concerns focused on the protection of valuable nature areas and species against the devastating influence of rapid industrialization and urbanisation. Inspired by ideas of Aldo Leopold many industrial societies started to establish nature reserves and semi-protected areas. However, state environmentalism did not begin to take off until the end of this period, when more and more people began demanding the tackling of environmental problems, creating public pressure. Influential books such as "Silent Spring" (1962) by marine biologist Rachel Carson or "Our Synthetic Environment" (1962) by social ecologist and anarchist Murray Bookchin on the dangers of chemicals, helped to raise awareness in their respective circles. Focus on nature protection and conservation during this period meant that tracing

the ecological, technological and economic aspects of these effects were central and the foundations of the emerging industrial society were mostly not questioned.

**2. The second wave of environmental concern** became prominent in the 1970s and lasted until mid-1980s. Here the word environment first started to be used more broadly and actively. The core demand was the reorganization of the social order as a *conditio sine qua non*, a precondition for creating an ecologically sound society. In this period many grassroots groups started to actively protest against nuclear power plants, war, and chemical agriculture, resulting in a rapid increase in the number and membership of various non-governmental organizations (Tokar 2001). The impulse for this wave had various sources including the experience of the first oil crisis in the early 1970s, Seveso chemical disaster in Italy (1976), Three Mile Island nuclear accident in the United States (1979), or Bhopal hazardous leak in India (1984), making the dangers explicit. 1972 was a milestone year in the awareness raising process with the publication of Club of Rome's influential future prognosis "Limits to Growth" and the gathering of the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. "Limits to Growth" highlighted the dangers of unrestrained economic growth and warned of a possible collapse of the global economy during the first decades of the 21st century, sparking a lot of interest and controversy. The UN conference was the first of its kind on the topic of environment and brought together for the first time state officials worldwide to discuss environmental challenges. Negotiations clearly showed the differences in interests across the globe: while the wealthier nations stressed nature conservation, reduction of pollution and population growth, the poorer saw conservationism as an attempt to deny them the benefits of economic growth. For the first time poverty as a major environmental threat was highlighted and the phrase "the pollution of poverty" was coined to express the idea (Dauvergne 2009: l).

The conference led to the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and initiated a process of systematic work on environmental legislation and planning by establishing environmental ministries, departments and agencies worldwide (Weale 2000). In the second half of the 1970s and first half of the 1980s, governmental environmentalism continued to strengthen, partly because of advances in scientific understanding, partly because of disasters, shocking the public and raising public interest and pressure. These developments helped to raise the profile of global environmental issues, while concurrently revealing the complexity and diversity of opinions about the causes and consequences of global environmental problems. Despite these efforts and developments, Mol estimates that although a large number of measures to combat environmental destruction were adopted and some were actually implemented, most of the challenged institutions of modernity, such as those which play a key role in the industrial structure, in economic relations and in scientific-technological developments, were not deterred from their devotion to a narrowly defined economic progress (Mol 1997: 138). Still, the first wave of disillusionment with technological progress as a source of solutions for the crisis was effected.

**3. The third wave of environmental concern** started in the second half of the 1980s and lasted until mid-1990s. In this period the sustainable development concept was introduced and started to gain ground, and the climate change discussion was introduced for the first time to wider audiences. Environmental troubles such as acid rains, Sandoz chemical spill, severely polluting the Rhine (1986), or the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine (1986) continued to alarm the public and the need for a change became more widely accepted across sectors. For example, the green political parties began to gain broader acceptance and social sciences started to deal with environmental issues much more intensively with first major theories essentially built around global environmental questions, such as Ulrich Beck's risk society theory (1986) in sociology. The commencement of actual, environment-induced transformations of the institutional order of the industrial society in this period was also

observed by the sociologists F.Buttel and P.Taylor (1992), and Arthur Mol (1997). As Mol put it: *"Today's institutional transformations to protect the environment can no longer be interpreted as mere window-dressing, as environmental reform was generally seen by environmental commentators in the 1970s"* (Mol 1997: 139). The major governmental milestones framing this third upsurge include the publication of the UN-summoned Brundtland report by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), titled "Our Common Future" (1987), providing the key definition of sustainable development, and the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (1992), resulting in the Agenda 21 action plan, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Statement of Forest Principles, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

Based on the results of the next analytical chapters, this periodization is continued from early 1990s onwards in subchapter 5.3.1.2. with focus on the dynamics of sustainable development processes.

# 3.2. Development of the sustainability scene

What exactly is meant when the concepts of "sustainability" and "sustainable development" are used in specific situations, texts or contexts is often not explicitly clarified or addressed? Finding out what is meant when different case study groups use these concepts to talk about a better future was among the main tasks of this research. This subchapter touches on meanings and aspects of these concepts which are relevant for the current research and reflects on some of the key perspectives, publications, and events that influenced how the sample groups understand and practice SD.

## 3.2.1. Development of the sustainability concept

From the etymological perspective, the word sustainable stems from the Latin "sustinere" and was taken up in the meaning "bearable" in the early 17th century English language. In connection with the sparing use of resources, it began to be used in German forestry in the early 18th century. Massive cut-downs had created a timber crisis and Hans Carl von Carlowitz used the concept "Nachhaltigkeit" when writing about more sustainable forestry in 1713 in his "Sylvicultura oeconomica" (Carlowitz 2000; Sebaldt 2002: 24). As Ulrich Grober points out, from the beginning of the term's use in the German language, sustainability is talked about when it is in danger – the concept is a *"child of crisis"* (Grober 2002). Grober summarises the etymological take by stating: *"In sum, 'sustainable' in various languages means, and has always meant, structures which can hold up, which can bear a load. That is the essential constant in the structure of this term"* (Grober 2015: 7).

People named as the pioneers of using the word depend on the social group and academic discipline. One less widespread candidate is proposed by the environmental writer Richard D. North – namely the British environmentalist Barbara Ward, author of the 1966 book "Spaceship Earth", founder of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), and co-author with René Dubos of the report "Only One Earth: The Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet" in 1971, commissioned by the UN to inform the participants of the 1972 UN Stockholm conference. She addressed sustainability issues, but did not use the concept as such.

Among the first documented uses of the concept in its current sense is the 1972 Club of Rome report "Limits to Growth". Grober suggests that there the word *sustainable* referred on the one hand to a model of the future which is resilient to sudden and uncontrollable collapse, and on the other hand aimed at ensuring the basic material requirements of all people on this planet (2015). The "Limits to Growth" report stated: *"We are searching for a model output that represents a world system that is: 1.*

*sustainable without sudden and uncontrollable collapse; and 2. capable of satisfying the basic material requirements of all of its people"* (Meadows et al 1972: 158). The etymological sources also support the opinion that in economics, agriculture, and ecology, the word *sustainability* has been used since 1972 (Etymology Online 2011). After the "Limits to Growth" report and the UN conference in that same year, the popularity of the concept started to grow.

Over time the term *sustainability* has acquired positive connotations and is frequently used as a synonym for *ecofriendly* or spoken of in terms of success or innovation (Fuchs 2008). However, it has also become an empty and contested concept. As Goggin put it:

> *"...it seems that 'sustainability' as a conceptual term has been co-opted for just about any form of development marketing, and has become a catchall for justifying business as usual... Like the term 'green,' 'sustainability' has become another buzzword that scholars must examine critically, if not cynically. ... The rhetorical nature of definitions is that they are always constructed, and thus always contested"* (Goggin 2009: 7).

As this research shows, the SD concept is a good example of the contested nature of constructed definitions.

## 3.2.2. Development of the sustainable development concept and process

The 1980 IUCN "World Conservation Strategy: Living Resources Conservation for Sustainable Development" is considered one of the first uses of the *sustainable development* concept. However, the meaning of the concept was different before mid-1980s. It was the publication of the Brundtland report in 1987 that aimed to change the way of seeing environment and development as two separate conflicting areas of concern. As the sociologist Wolfgang Sachs put it: *"Sustainable development as a field of discourse emerged in the 1980s out of the marriage between developmentalism and environmentalism, which were previously seen as distinct fields"* (Sachs 1997: 71).

The first widely recognized and to date highly popular definition of sustainable development, attempting to reconcile ecological and economic concerns, was created by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, popularly known as the Brundtland Commission), set up by the United Nations in 1983 to develop ideas for bringing together the values of environmentalism and the goals of development. In 1987 WCED published its report "Our common future", tying together concern for the carrying capacity of natural systems with the social challenges faced by humanity. Their world-famous definition is*: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"* (Brundtland Commission 2004: 62).

The breakthrough of the *sustainable development* concept to the mainstream and the starting point of the contemporary sustainability debate was the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (also known as the Earth Summit) in Rio de Janeiro. There 170 participating countries embraced Agenda 21, a new document indicating ways to a sustainable future and stressing the social aspect of SD more clearly than had been done before (Kunze 2009). Ever since 1992 the SD concept has played an increasingly important role in debates about the future. The legitimation and global acceptance of the concept became possible because international organisations, national governments as well as stakeholders in business and non-profit sectors started to use it actively for planning and policy making (Tremmel 2003: 27, Grabe 2010: 12).

The United Nations had strongly influenced and guided the global planning and actions towards SD already before the concept was coined, helping to raise the profile of environmental concern ever since the 1968 UNESCO Conference on the Conservation of Biospheres. Thus the UN can be called the midwife of the concept and remains a prominent promoter to date. Pivotal UN

initiatives raising the profile of environmental topics, paving way and later popularizing SD have directly influenced the situation in Europe.

Table 9 lists a selection of UN milestones from 1968 to 2015, relevant in the context of this research as influencers of the (developing) EU sustainability scene.

**Table 9. Overview of UN milestones 1968-2015 influencing the EU sustainability scene.**

| Year | Event | Short description |
|---|---|---|
| **1968** | UNESCO Conference on the Conservation of Biospheres | Was the first intergovernmental meeting highlighting the global nature of environmental problems, adoption of international recommendations on the environment. |
| **1972** | Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment | Attended by the representatives of 113 countries, 19 inter-governmental agencies, and over 400 inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, it marked the beginning of modern political and public awareness of global environmental problems. Its results include founding of many environmental programs and governance institutions across the globe. |
| **1987** | WCED report "Our Common Future" | Provided the key definition of SD on meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. |
| **1992** | UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro | The starting point of the international SD process with 187 countries committing to it. The resulting "Agenda 21: Joint Program for Implementing Sustainable Development in the 21 Century" defining global social, economic and environmental action goals until 2030 still serves as a yardstick for measuring progress. |
| **2000** | Millennium Development Goals | MDG's were adopted by UN General Assembly in 2000 to target poverty and achieve sustainable development by 2015. |
| **2002** | World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg | The Rio+10 conference WSSD added momentum to the Agenda initiative and stressed the equal importance of social, environmental and economic aspects of sustainability. |
| **2005-2014** | A Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014 | DESD aimed to integrate SD principles into all aspects of education and learning. The aim is to improve the understanding of the concept of SD helping individuals to grasp their role and the causes of our damaged world, enabling them to consume, produce and act more sustainably. SD is closely bound with the mission of the UN and UNESCO on human rights, peace, health, poverty reduction, environmental protection, education, and culture. |
| **2012** | UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro | Also known as UNCSD, or Rio+20. For the first time, the focus of discussing SD was connected to green growth. The outcome "The future we want" has been heavily criticised both across sectors as too little and too late. |
| **2015** | Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) | UN post-2015 agenda for SD is the result of an agreement between the countries at Rio+20 to establish an intergovernmental process to develop a set of *"action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate"* SD goals to help drive the implementation of SD globally planned to be adopted in September at the UN SD summit. It is part of Agenda 2030, an update of Agenda 21, to help the SD issues to regain momentum |

While social aspects were included as equally relevant in the Brundtland report, in the 1980s and 1990s the debate was more about environmental and economic aspects of sustainability. The relevance of social aspects started to rise in relation to preparations for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, also called Rio +10 (Colantonio 2011: 35). It summarised on progress and problems based on the reports of nations and regions and new actions were agreed upon. Rio+10 was designed to evaluate progress toward SD, establish mechanisms to implement the Rio goals, and develop a global strategy to reach the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDG-s) in a sustainable

way. The main emphasis was on global partnership and the more effective implementation of the Agenda 21 (A21) document. Dedication to the goals set by A21 as the core and basis of policy making for nations and cooperation programmes was emphasised. The interconnected nature of SD dimensions was acknowledged along with the recognition that no pillar should be taller or wider than any other (Grabe 2010: 36). The Johannesburg summit was also the beginning of the biggest global educational initiative for sustainability to date, exemplifying well the rise of importance attributed to the social pillar. In 2002, recognizing that SD is an urgent social and ecological need, and that education is an indispensable element for achieving it, the United Nations General Assembly declared a 10-year period from 2005 to 2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). Dauvergne estimates that by that time, the global environmental change was no longer at the top of the global agenda, as the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 profoundly changed foreign policy priorities worldwide (Dauvergne 2009: liii). Still, the Johannesburg Summit was a landmark event reaffirming the importance of governmental environmentalism, producing documents that broadly supported the SD, most notably the Johannesburg Declaration on SD (a list of nonbinding challenges and commitments), and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation aiming to achieve by 2005 the implementation of national SD strategies, by 2010 slowing down of loss of biodiversity, by 2015 safe and balanced use of fish stock, by 2020 a scheme for safe handling of chemicals, plus ratification of the Kyoto protocol. Like the original Rio Summit, Rio+10 added yet another layer to SD, raising further the profile of interconnected environmental issues among world leaders and within state bureaucracies. The forerunner EU made special progress in relation to SD as preparation for Rio+20, and even member states were slower. Rio+10 cemented SD as the core organizing concept for governmental environmentalism and brought many NGOs and community groups into partnership with businesses and governments to implement policies to promote SD.

In preparation for the 2012 Rio + 20 World Summit, UN created a global high-level board of sustainable development. The aims of the 2012 Summit were to reinforce the continuing will of the nations to implement SD, to evaluate progress in realising the goals set by the Agenda 21 and Johannesburg Summit, and to define new challenges. The topics of the conference included green economy in the context of SD and poverty eradication and the institutional framework for SD. There was a wave of disappointment after the Rio+20 conference in Europe across sectors as no progress seemed to be made. However, as a result of Rio+20 the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) started to be prepared, aiming at creating an ambitious post-2015 agenda *"to achieve, as quickly as possible, a paradigm shift to economic development that finally respects the ecological boundaries of or planet and at the same time eliminates poverty and hunger"* (BMU 2014). The more outwardly oriented processes that are related to Agenda 2030 (United Nations 2015), the result of the post-agenda 2015 process, do not belong to the research scope of this thesis. However, it deserves to be noted that although A2030 is presented as something new, the A21 document from 1992 in fact had the same timeframe reaching up to 2030 (see Table 11). More information about European involvement in A2030 process can be found from International Cooperation and Development page of the European Commission (Europeaid 2015), which again clearly shows the context in which SD is currently considered in the EU.

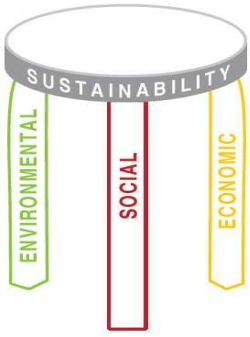
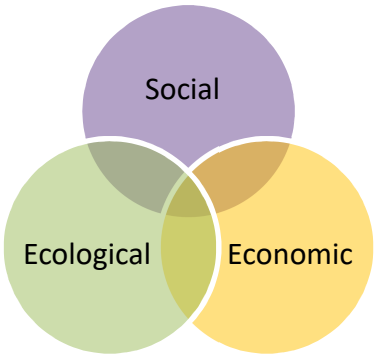
### 3.2.3. Making sense of the SD models

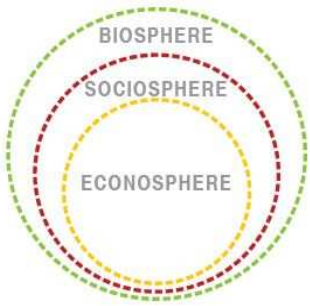
A gradual change in focus can be observed from an ecologically centred concept to a more integral one. There is no doubt that "sustainability" and "sustainable development" are understood in a variety of ways by different social groups. Numerous researchers in the broad field of sustainability studies acknowledge this confusion and have criticised them as semantic gold dust, empty signifiers, fuzzy

concepts, oxymorons, umbrella terms, utopia, compromises, clichés, metaphors, buzzwords, or just greenwashing tools to indicate improvements where there are none (e.g. Sachs 1997, Sebaldt 2002, Faber et al. 2005, Azamova 2006, Fuchs 2008, Jäger 2009, Goggin 2009, Grabe 2010). The diversity of views on what these concepts mean and aim at, testify to their normative, politically sensitive and contested nature, making it fairly difficult to say when they are abused or misrepresented. As a result, they concepts are often used randomly, often as synonyms.

The aspects considered as staples when SD is discussed include since the Brundtland definition economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental balance. This division was fortified in the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 where Agenda 21, a document taking these three aspects into account, was adopted. Table 10 below offers an overview of three commonly used models reflecting the interrelations of these three parts: the three pillar model, here called the three-legged-stool model; the three overlapping dimensions model; and the nested dependencies model (Gibson 2006, Willard 2009).

**Table 10. Common types of three-dimensional sustainable development models.**

| Name of the model | Description | Visual representation |
|---|---|---|
| **Three pillar model, also known as the three-legged stool model** | This SD-model argues that the pillars are separate, but they also need to be equal to make a balanced, stable basis to uphold SD. For that the pillars must be equally long and strong, otherwise SD becomes unstable and potentially dangerous. In different contexts various pillars dominate over the others, which cannot be depicted with this model, rendering it suitable only for presenting an "ideal model". |  |
| **Three overlapping dimensions model** | This model acknowledges the intersections of the dimensions. Resizing the dimensions enables to depict which factors are more dominant, thus adding a more functional dynamic aspect. Its weakness is that it shows that only limited parts of each dimension are related to the others, indicating that other parts are independent. |  |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Nested dependency model** | This model depicts the overall embeddedness of economy and society in nature. It indicates that economy is dependent on society, and society is dependent on ecology. Its weakness is that it does not indicate how economy and society impact the environment. This model is also used by proponents of strong sustainability. |  |

All of these models represent different perceptions of SD. Not all actors and literature agree with such modelling. In the context of this study also the role and relevance of culture is considered additionally.

**Inter-generational and intra-generational needs and equity**

As the Brundtland Report already underlined, the concept of needs plays a relevant part in sustainable development thinking, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given to ensure equity. The relevance of both the intergenerational and the intragenerational equity is underlined to ensure fairness and equal opportunities to fulfil the needs. These issues are discussed further in Chapter 5.

**Strong and weak sustainability: opposing perspectives**

There are two different ways of looking at the need to ensure that future generations can supply their needs, called strong sustainability and weak sustainability. Often the concept of "capital" is used to differentiate between *weak* and *strong* sustainability. According to the weak sustainability perspective the environment is seen as a reservoir of natural resources (natural capital) that is available for wealth creation. It is considered sufficient if the future generations will have the same ability to create wealth as the present generations and that they can be adequately compensated for any loss of natural capital by creating alternative sources of wealth e.g. through scientific innovation (Beder 1996). According to the strong sustainability perspective environment offers more than just economic potential and the depleted natural resources can therefore not be replaced by human-made wealth. Strong sustainability argues that future generations should not inherit a degraded environment, no matter how many human-made resources as extra sources of wealth are available to them (ibid). Representatives of deep ecology movement have called these perspectives shallow and deep ecology (Naess 1973, Sessions 1995).

These two approaches to SD provide a more concrete example for what different groups can mean when they talk about SD and are further discussed in Chapter 5. Figure 6 summarises the key differences of those two approaches.

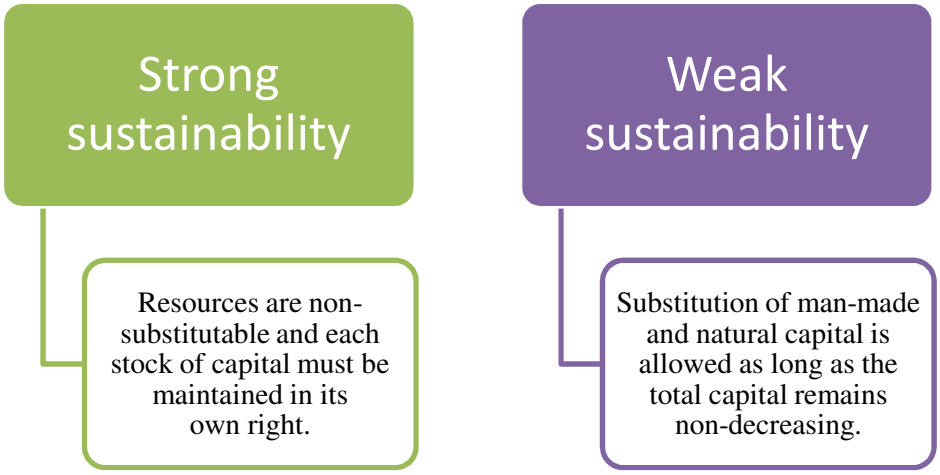



**Figure 6. Capital use as the key difference between strong and weak sustainability.**

Already back in 1992, the Australian Government's ESD Steering Committee argued that, unless substantial change occurs, the present generation may not be able to pass on an equivalent stock of environmental goods to the next generation (Australian ESD Steering Committee 1992: 10). This would be due to three factors: 1) the rates of loss of animal and plant species, arable land, water quality, tropical forests and cultural heritage are especially serious; 2) we will not pass on to future generations the ozone layer or global climate system that the current generation inherited; 3) the prospective impact of continuing population growth and the environmental consequences if rising standards of material income around the world produce the same sorts of consumption patterns that are characteristic of the current industrialised countries.

**Sustainability and development – a fitting pair?**

This third aspect contributes overwhelmingly to the anxieties and is a fundamental question: does putting development and sustainability into one concept make sense? Is sustainable development an oxymoron – a self-contradictory phrase, where seemingly opposite words combine to suddenly make sense? There is no consensus on the question of when to use the words separately and when together. Grabe finds (2010: 18) that while sustainability refers to a static process, to something which remains, can bear a load, becoming more sustainable is a process and because the word development refers to a dynamic process, putting the two words together, gives a meaningful concept. But there are also arguments for leaving *development* out, as it can be seen as a vehicle for the Western ideology and dominance. In this context, the economist John Robinson brings up an interesting observation that governments, businesses, and organisations tend to use the *sustainable development* concept, while scientists, social movements, civil society and NGOs tend to favour *sustainability* (and increasingly, *resilience*). Robinson finds that from one side the concept of SD is less radical and thus more attractive for more conservative groups like governments and big organisations. On the other hand, its use brings up the principal question that development can be understood as synonymous with growth and in this context the sustainable development concept might contradict the essence of sustainability (Robinson 2004: 370). A good example of contradicting interests is population growth: further population growth is counterproductive from an ecological point of view since it would increase the use of resources and be detrimental to ecological sustainability. Whereas, from the economic point of view, a further population growth (in some countries and nationalities at least) is desired to counteract the demographic imbalance brought about by an aging population.

**Ethics for sustainable living: culture and sustainable development**

The SD concept has usually been broken down into three constituent parts: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, and socio-political sustainability.

The UN and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have been pioneering connecting the environmental issue with social and cultural dimensions, expressing the view that SD is closely related to culture (UNESCO 2013) as SD is about changing our personal behaviours and lifestyles, includes human rights, peace (without which no model of development is possible), gender equality and health. In 1995 UNESCO published its ground-breaking report "Our Creative Diversity" of the World Commission on Culture and Development (1995) and has continued exploring the ways in which culture is providing guidance on living sustainably, and also keeping track of the respective developments – see for example the 2000 UNESCO "World Culture Report", or 2009 UNESCO "World Report 2: Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue". The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions from 2005 is one of the first documents by an influential international governance organisation tackling the relationship between culture and sustainable development. There has been reflection on the future implementation of the Convention (Throsby 2008). What brings their efforts closer to the CS level is their special concern on giving voice to the values and knowledge of indigenous people as a necessary feature of SD.

Another important document, often neglected in discussions of SD, or the relations of SD and culture, is the Earth Charter (The Earth Charter Initiative 2013). This layered document with a Preamble, 16 guiding principles and 59 supporting principles outlines an integrated vision for human rights and SD. UNESCO has also been a forerunner, supporting the creation of the Earth Charter from 1972 when the idea was first expressed. The need for an Earth Charter was first raised in the Stockholm declaration's call for *"a common outlook and for common principles to inspire and guide the peoples of the world."* (United Nations 1972). In its 1987 report, "Our Common Future", the UN World Commission on Environment and Development issued a call for a new charter that would consolidate and extend relevant legal principles, creating *"new norms … needed to maintain livelihoods and life on our shared planet"* and *"to guide state behaviour in the transition to sustainable development."* (United Nations 1987).

After the Rio Summit in 1992 hundreds of groups and thousands of individuals worldwide became involved in the consultation process for drafting the Earth Charter. The Benchmark Draft I was largely based on a review of values and principles embedded in existing international laws, treaties and declarations, and released at the Rio+5 conference and circulated the world for comment. Recommendations were integrated into a new Benchmark II version, released in April 1999. The global review and consultation process continued throughout 1999, culminating in the launch of the Earth Charter at a meeting in March 2000 at UNESCO's Paris headquarters.

A key feature of the Earth Charter campaign was an investigation of local and national cultures to identify the common beliefs and values that underlie a global ethic for living sustainably. The Earth Charter is a declaration of interdependence and universal responsibility as well as an urgent call to build a global partnership for SD, recognizing the interconnected nature of environmental, economic, social, cultural, ethical, and spiritual problems. The four guiding principles of the Earth Charter are: caring for the community of life with understanding, compassion and love; respecting Earth and life in all its diversity; building democratic societies that are just, sustainable, participatory and peaceful; securing Earth´s bounty and beauty for present and future generations (The Earth Charter Initiative 2013). These principles illustrate this approach, while underlining that policies which address one problem can impact and improve upon others.

For all its broad base and significant contents, the Earth Charter has had little political influence and many stakeholders (also the ones participating in this research) are often not aware of its existence and developing parallel ideas. Over the years the UN has developed many ideas on education and culture, but due to their non-binding nature, implementation has remained the weak link.

Until the beginning of the 21st century, culture was rarely considered as a separate pillar or dimension of sustainability. Some authors using the 3-fold models did consider cultural aspects, but saw them as integrated into the social pillar. One of the first authors to suggest culture as an autonomous pillar was the Australian researcher Jon Hawkes in his book "The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's essential role in public planning" (2001).

During the past decade, different interest groups have actively promoted the idea of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability. This includes Living Principles, an international grassroots initiative of designers, that differentiates between the social and the cultural sphere, defining social as *"actions and issues that affect all aspects of society, including poverty, violence, injustice, education, healthcare, safe housing, labor and human rights,"* and the cultural dimension as *"actions and issues that affect how communities manifest identity, preserve and cultivate traditions, and develop belief systems and commonly accepted values,"* (Living Principles 2011).

Another example is the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Committee on Culture, stating that three dimensions are not enough to reflect the complexity of contemporary society and that culture must be included in this development model: *"Today, the world is not exclusively facing challenges of an economic, social or environmental nature. Creativity, knowledge, diversity and beauty are essential premises for dialogue for peace and progress, as they are intrinsically related to human development and freedom."* They compiled the "Agenda 21 for culture" in 2004 which proposes strengthening local cultural policies and integrating culture as a fundamental element of our development model, stressing the importance of developing a solid cultural policy and advocating a cultural dimension in all public policies (UCLG 2004). UCLG have uttered hope that: *"Perhaps the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 will be the occasion for really giving culture the place it deserves in the future strategy for sustainable development."* (UCLG 2004).

GEN and the TT Network are also both making mention of the cultural dimension in their rhetoric. The discussion is thus currently active and it remains to be seen, how the relationships between culture and SD will evolve, and in which ways culture will be understood by different participants and included in sustainability models.

The author of these lines argued in 2013 for the need of the explicit inclusion of cultural aspects for enabling cross-sectoral cooperation by understanding the differences and bridging the gaps between rhetoric and actions on the way towards co-creating a more sustainable future (Tamm 2013b). Exploring the relationships between culture and sustainability, Oliver Parodi has argued in his 2015 article "The Missing Aspect of Culture in Sustainability Concepts" (2015) that the neglected cultural references in the SD discourse include inter- and transcultural aspects, lack of interrelations between individual and collective, lack of attention to aesthetics in sustainability, and lack of non-material aspects in relation to sustainability.

Interestingly the academic interest in the interplay between SD and culture seems to have risen in importance in the period that coincided with this study. For example, the heads of the research project "Investigating Cultural Sustainability" that ran from 2011 to 2015, commented that until 2015 the prevailing research still tackled the conventional sustainability discourses rooted in environmental and economic perspectives.

In summary it can be said that while the concept of SD offers a positive long-term vision of progress that aims to integrate and balance long- and short-term perspectives of development, attempting to reconcile local and global social, economic and environmental needs of present and future generations, the current development model is failing to secure sustainable development for the present world population and seriously undermines the prospects of future generations to do the same (Bernheim 2006: 79).

# 3.3. Development of the selected actors

This subchapter explores the developments that paved the way through raising environmental awareness to the rise of sustainable development issues in the EU. Based mainly on written documents and interview data and focusing on the SD-related developments between 2001 and 2014, this analysis provides context for understanding the in depth case study analysis in the following chapters. The analysis of the actors varies to some extent in length and detail due to differences of the cases in terms of active years and availability of information.

## 3.3.1. The civil society level

The following subchapter maps the key developments related to the rise of relevance of the SD issues among the chosen civil society case study groups. The characterisation of the case study actors starts with the international networks, followed by the individual ecovillages, transition initiatives and national cleanup campaigns. Whereas there are many texts available documenting the developments on the governance levels, the info on the developments on the grassroots level is much scarcer and stemps from the initiative webpages and interviews made for this study (to fill in the gaps).

### 3.3.1.1. Development of GEN-Europe

Inspired by the new social movements in the 1960s, and especially the Danish co-housing initiative, the GEN started to take shape in early 1990s. The initiators Hildur and Ross Jackson had lived in a Danish cohousing initiative from 1972 to 1991 and felt a need to take the next step towards realizing their vision *"of what a balanced, healthy, fun and sustainable lifestyle would be like"* (Jackson 1998: 1). At the end of 1980s the Jacksons founded the charitable Gaia Trust with the intention of supporting the transition to a sustainable and more holistic future society through grants and proactive initiatives promoting their vision (ibid).

The consolidation of the ecovillage movement began in 1991 at an international gathering of like-minded people, and by commissioning a global survey from Diane and Robert Gilman to identify the best ecovillage practices worldwide to form a basis for a future strategy. The Gilman's report "Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities" (Gilman and Gilman 1991) provided the first and still widely used definition of an ecovillage: *"a human scale, full-featured settlement, in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world, in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future"* (ibid). The report concluded that no single fully functioning ecovillage existed, but that the plurality of the existing initiatives collectively indicated a vision of a different culture and way of life that deserves further development. Thus, the sustainable way of life and the cultural aspects of SD included from the start.

The Gaia Trust served as a parent for GEN and remained its main financial supporter for over ten years, later also awarding grants to ecovillagers and awards to excellent ecovillages. In 1993 the Danish Ecovillage Network (LØS) was founded and in 1995 the decision to create a global ecovillage network was made at the first international ecovillage conference "Ecovillages and sustainable

communities for the 21st Century" in Findhorn, Scotland (Jackson 1998: 2, Jackson 2004: 5). The new network was formally presented during the UN Habitat conference's NGO Forum in Istanbul in 1996.

GEN-Europe is regional network of the global GEN. As a membership organisation it is open to a wide range of projects regardless of their political, religious or cultural backgrounds. The members in the first decade consisted mainly of intentional rural ecovillage projects; since about 2010 the focus broadened to include a wider spectrum of initiatives with similar values and goals. This was motivated by the wish to change from creating ecovillages as green oases contrasting with the mainstream society to making a bigger impact and rising above the radar by including also traditional villages and urban communities. As more traditional villages and movements have connected to GEN, seeking to preserve their unique qualities and achieve social, ecological, economic and cultural sustainability, guidelines for indigenous and traditional villages for joining GEN were developed (Joubert et al. 2010: 28).

According to the GEN-Europe Statutes of Association, Art 5, the individual ecovillages and ecovillage networks recognized and accepted by the council of the Association and willing to implement the goals of the Association can become members[8]. In addition to full members, there are also aspiring members and supporting members. Full members are established ecovillages and ecovillage networks with at least eight permanent adult residents for at least two years with a membership structure and decision-making process**,** whose vision and goals are in accordance with GEN vision and goals and who are actively engaged in the network (GEN-E 2011a).

The special focus of GEN has been on informal education and awareness raising, ranging from permaculture trainings to Gaia education trainings summing up the ecovillage experiences. The efforts for consolidating ecovillage knowledge and experiences into educational content started in a meeting in Fjordvang, Denmark in 1998 and continued over a series of workshops until 2005 culminating in formulation of a transdisciplinary approach to education for sustainability. The result became known in 2005 as Gaia Education: *"ecovillages around the world offer valuable experiences and lessons about the design and creation of sustainable communities in rural and urban settings. Gaia Education is united in the effort to make the knowledge and skills developed in ecovillages accessible to a wide audience"* (GEN-E 2011b). The first milestone in the development of Gaia Education was the launch of an innovative curriculum for Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) during the GEN 10th anniversary conference at Findhorn in 2005 (Gaia Education 2011). Gaia Education works in partnership with urban and rural communities, universities, ecovillages, government and non-government agencies and the UN. Since 2006 Gaia Education has supported the delivery of hundreds of programmes on five continents.

As part of their education incentive, and in cooperation with Gaia Education, Gaia Trust, Permanent Publications and UNESCO DESD framework, GEN gathered their member's sustainability expertise into four books published between 2007 and 2012. These books, called the "Four Keys" series, cover the four aspects of sustainability that GEN distinguishes. The first book focuses on the social sustainability issues "The Social Key: Beyond you and me. Inspirations and Wisdom for Building Community" (Joubert et al. 2007); the second volume "Economic Key: Gaian Economics. Living well within planetary limits" (Dawson et al. 2010) on sustainable economics; the third volume "Ecological Key: Designing Ecological Habitats. Creating a Sense of Place" (Mare et al. 2011) on ecological sustainability and the final edition "Worldview Key: The Song of the Earth. A Synthesis of the Scientific and Spiritual Worldviews" (Harland and Keepin 2012) on cultural dimensions of SD.

[8] From the updated Statutes of Association of the Global Ecovillage Network of Europe e.V. from 2011.

In 1998 the first ecovillages were officially named among the United Nations' top 100 listing of best practices as excellent models for sustainable living. Since 2001 the GEN is an NGO with a special consultative status with the United Nations. GEN is also a member of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and a partner of United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). The GEN keeps mostly out of daily politics, but has also made attempts to bring their persectives into politics, e.g. by co-organising a two-week long bottom-up conference in Christiania called "Windows of Hope" during the 2009 Copenhagen climate conference, bringing together environmentalists and spiritual leaders around the world.

Since 2009 GEN has been actively cooperating with Transition network, e.g. by co-developing and offering Transition to Resilience (T2R) trainings.

#### 3.3.1.1.1. Development of Lilleoru

The core group that later founded Lilleoru started to form in 1992 from people visiting Ingvar Villido's Raja and Buddhi yoga classes in Tallinn (Tago 2009). The group met weekly for intensive four to five-hour learning sessions. This coincided with the time that Estonia regained its independence – in the Soviet times yoga was not allowed so such a group would have been banned. In the summer of 1993, the students decided to help Villido in cleaning up a patch of land in the former Lilleoru farm in Northern Estonia, where he was planning to build a house for his family. Working and practicing together in Lilleoru changed the plans and instead, a learning centre for common use was built.

For a long time, most community members did not live in Lilleoru, but visited it weekly to learn, practice and work together. In the first years, Lilleoru was more closed as the people focused on the studies and building it up. Since the 2000nds, and especially 2010, Lilleoru has developed into an open living and learning space. Most families moved to Lilleoru after the building of the Taevsamaa village was finished in early 2010s.

The focus of the community has been from the outset on learning to know the inner word of human being, making Lilleoru first of all a learning community. Started as a yogic community, the central aim has been to master the art of conscious change knowledge to increase self-awareness and improve the world by learning to improve ourselves. According to the mission and vision statements co-created in the 2008 community assembly, Lilleoru's mission is sharing and applying knowledge that supports the conscious development of people. Lilleoru described itself as a living and learning environment with a training centre and ecovillage, orientated towards living a more humane life. The aim has been to share practical knowledge about the conscious way of living. The key shared values are self-awareness and openness, reflected in the slogan "*Change your inner world and the world around you changes"* (Lilleoru 2012). Teachings that have been used and practiced in Lilleoru in the service of self-discovery and self-transformation include Babaji's Kriya Yoga, Haidakhan Babaji teaching, and Ingvar Villido´s own teachings from the series of Art of Conscious Change, but also Native American wisdom (Tago 2009). Sustainable way of living was seen as a natural result of learning to live with awareness.

The name Lilleoru was given during the Soviet occupation when the old farmland was confiscated and divided into two. The name means "valley of flowers" and today both parts of the land belong to the community, making the old farmstead complete again. On its 20 hectares are the Flower of Life Park, organic gardens, open learning and community centre, Taevasmaa ecovillage, Amrita lake, a pristine forest and an ashram for advanced studies. Lilleoru organises different courses across Estonia and abroad on the Art of Conscious Change, yoga and ecological living, publishes thematic

books and offers locally grown medicinal herbs tea mixtures from its ecological gardens. It is partly self-sufficient in terms of food and waste.

Lilleoru had about four hundred community members, including approximately 120 NGO members, about sixty permanent inhabitants and thousands of short-term visitors around the year. Cooperation with local municipality has been good as Lilleoru actively participates in writing projects to develop the area and has brought many people to live to the countryside, helping to enliven it both in population and economic terms.

#### 3.3.1.1.2. Development of Sieben Linden

The idea of creating a self-sufficient ecological village stems from 1989 and in 1991 the Ecovillage Circle of Friends (Freundeskreis Ökodorf e.V.) was founded as a union for all interested people. In 1993 the core group bought a project centre in Groß Chüden, located 25 km north of the current Sieben Linden, for gathering direct community-experience. Receiving the TATORTE Prize from the German Environment Foundation (Deutschen Bundesstiftung Umwelt) as an exemplary ecological community initiative supported buying the 22 ha property near Poppau, where the seven linden trees (sieben Linden) used to stand, giving the property its current name.

Though Germany is not very conservative concerning alternative ways of living, creating an ecovillage was not an easy process in the early 1990s. The clarification process that the community would not be of any danger to local population was emotional and energy intensive on both sides.

In the summer of 1997 the first settlers moved in caravans to Sieben Linden. In 1999 a union for building ecological buildings called Wohnungsgenossenschaft Sieben Linden e.G. was founded. The ecovillage has grown from the initial 20 pioneers to 140 inhabitants, including 100 adults and 40 children. The initial idea was that the ideal size would be about 300 people of diverse age groups and backgrounds. However, the organic growth of the community remains slow as it cannot be pushed, depending on how many people can be integrated at the given moment. The area of the ecovillage has grown to 81.5 ha, including 45 ha forest, 3 ha gardens and 8 ha of building land.

Sieben Linden was described by its inhabitants in the interviews as a trendsetting intentional community project aiming towards high ecological standards to establish an environmentally and socially progressive model settlement. The core motivation for creating Sieben Linden was ecological in nature, including the wish not to harm the environment, live fairly and reduce the ecological footprint in all areas of life. A further goal is to enable living a self-governed and, to some degree, self-sufficient lives.

The members of the ecovillage are aware of sustainability issues in their daily choices and share their experiences and knowledge with the public through a range of educational offers and public events. The gathered know-how is shared in seminars about community experience and wisdom. Sieben Linden was from 2005 to 2014 one of the partners of the UN World Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. The approximately ten public events per month during the research period ranged from the Sunday café information event to co-worker weeks, offering the visitors a chance to work for 2-4 days e.g. in the forest, garden or kitchen, depending on the need (Sieben Linden 2012).

Basic shared values include transparency, building trust via honest and violence-free communication, mutual respect, and broad-based decision-making. Through active participation in different initiatives and networks including GEN and TN, and occasionally also public protests, many inhabitants participate in current broader societal processes.

As the society at large has more fully embraced the relevance of living within the ecological limits over the last 20 years, Sieben Linden has moved closer to the mainstream. This has happened in the process of compromising between the original, more radical ideals and the preferences of the majority of the current inhabitants. This has meant neglecting the more radical ideas about self-

sufficiency, full food autonomy, life without electricity and sharing economy instead of monetary exchange causing a number of people who wished to live in that way to leave. Economic equity is also strived towards with all permanent inhabitants co-owning land and infrastructure, but everybody takes care of their own financial situation and has their own money. A significant part of the community income flows from organising courses, thematic weeks and receiving guests providing income for the people working in the seminar branch.

Currently, the community is partly self-sufficient regarding energy, food, and waste. In some instances being part of the grid is unavoidable, as is the case with water that is very deep underground. The work is still in progress and inhabitants are looking for ways of doing things in a better way, but overall they consider Sieben Linden an exemplary model of ecologically sound communal living.

#### 3.3.1.1.3. Development of Tamera

Tamera was created after long years of preparation as a planned social experiment, calling itself a school and research station for a realistic utopia. The core group founding Tamera in 1995 started to form already back in 1978. Dieter Duhm, the initiator and longstanding mentor of Tamera, was a student leader in the German '68 student movement, speaking actively up against the Vietnamese war and western capitalism. After publishing the book “Fear in Capitalism” he reached the conclusion that without changing the violent human relationship patterns, political attempts towards change would always remain insufficient. Calling it stepping out of all old structures, he left the Marxist path, his job and family and started to search for a new sustainable human basis (Duhm 2012).

In 1978 he initiated the Bauhütte social experiment in Herrenberg. The group with initially five members began as a laboratory for ecological research and the study of alternate technology, experimenting with holistic architecture, biological sewage treatment, hydrodynamics and organic gardening. Soon they encountered serious difficulties as interpersonal conflicts surfaced, often centred around issues of male power, antagonistic rivalry, and sexual jealousy. To find a solid basis for a functioning human community, the focus shifted to interpersonal issues, testing out different ways of living and loving. In 1986 the liberal-minded experiment located in rural Southern Germany came under a wave of negative media attention due to rumours around free sexuality. Consequently, the group lost their permit to hold workshops, their charitable status and tenancy, ending the project in 1987. This led to realisation that the needed change would not be brought about by an insular commune of drop-outs, but instead a community-based political and cultural movement offering a positive alternative for the whole of society.

Search for a new location started and in 1995 land was bought in Portugal for creating the Tamera Peace Research Centre (Tamera 2012). The founding thought was to develop a non-violent life model for cooperation between human beings, animals, and nature. The aim is to (re)establish a culture of peace between people as well as between people and nature to transform the current violent societal patterns and attain a more sustainable way of life. The healing of love and human community became the focus of the project, as it is believed that there can be no peace on Earth as long as there is war in love. The founding ideas of Tamera stem primarily from Dieter Duhm und Sabine Lichtenfels, who have a lifelong partnership with the goal of creating a future without war and a culture of peace that is based on love and reconciliation between the sexes. Their cooperation resulted in the Plan of the Healing Biotopes – places where prerequisites for peace are researched, realized and tested in a decentralized way, leading to a pool of knowledge for making the global paradigm shift toward peace. The long-term plan is to build up a global network of centres of violence-free co-habitation based on new social, ecological and ethical foundations to achieve a new, peaceful Earth – Terra Nova.

On its first decade, Tamera was mostly inwardly directed, focusing on internal group work. Until 2006 about 90% of the residents were German. The German language is still prevailing, but the

share of English and Portuguese speaking people has been constantly growing ever since. The aim of opening the community has been fostering SD through active peacework – by building a worldwide peace workers network, developing the Global Campus educational courses, courses on art and healing, the sacred matrix and holographic worldview, and the theory of global healing, and organising pilgrimages to war and conflict zones (Lichtenfels 2012).

In 2014 Tamera had about 160 community members, from whom about 100 live there permanently and are called colleagues, about 40 are interns and about 20 short-term guests. The ecological and technological research includes the implementation of water retention landscape for healing nature, as well as a model for regional autonomy in energy and food (Dregger 2010). The community has been recognised in Portugal and beyond for developing practical and cost-effective solutions for global challenges like water retention landscapes to reverse desertification, or solar systems robust and cheap enough to be also used in poorer regions of the world.

### 3.3.1.2. Development of the Transition network

The idea of the Transition movement started to develop in 2005 in Ireland. There, permaculture trainer and practitioner Rob Hopkins was teaching at the Kinsale Further Education College and instructed the compilation of the Kinsale Energy Descent Action Plan (EDAP, adopted in 2005 by Kinsale's town council) suggesting a timetable for how Kinsale could make the transition from a high energy consumption town to a low energy town (Transition network 2012a). Hopkins was living in the countryside, and planning his own ecovillage, when he saw the film "End of Suburbia" (Greene 2004) on peak oil, making him question his lifestyle choices and dependence of the car. He decided that it makes more sense to go where the people are, rather than expect people to come to him, so he abandoned the ecovillage idea and moved to a small town Totnes in Devon, where he had found like-minded people.

Following an intensive program of awareness rising on the issues of peak oil and climate change, Totnes became the first Transition Town in September 2006. In the same year identifying (or *dreaming up,* as the team called it) the core elements of the Transition model started (Transition network 2012a).

In 2007 the next Transition initiatives started to emerge. To support such groups the "Transition Initiatives Primer" was created, as well as the course "Training for Transition". Since then a number of trainings, including Train the Trainer, Art of wellbeing, Inner Transition, and Resilient food systems have been developed (Transition network 2012a).

By 2008 Transition initiatives had developed in Australia, Canada, England, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, USA, and Wales. In 2008, the 100$^{th}$ official Transition movement Fujino in Japan achieved its Transition Town status. To fit the real life context the boundaries of the initial town-setting were broadened to also include villages, islands, and cities in transition, and the Transition Towns name was changed to Transition network (TN). As Hopkins explained it: *"Transition network" (small n) refers to the broad international community of individuals and groups basing their work on the Transition model"* (Hopkins and Lipman 2009: 6). The mission of the Transition network has been to support, encourage, inspire and interconnect all the people involved in transition as they adopt and adapt the Transition model on their journey towards rebuilding resilience and drastically reducing $CO_2$ emissions. Community-led responses were deemed necessary for dealing with climate change and the end of the age of cheap energy in a positive, encouraging manner.

Development into a worldwide network was supported by active dissemination of knowledge and experiences both online and offline. The first transition book, Rob Hopkin's "The Transition

Handbook" from 2008 was soon followed by a growing staple of "Transition Guides" on food, local money, transition timeline, working with local government, sustainable housing and energy to help communities through various stages of transition etc. The two Transition movies, both directed by Emma Goude, titled "In Transition 1.0" and "In Transition 2.0" also helped to spread the model.

The transitioners estimated that next to the official initiatives, there are about 5-10 times as many initiatives using transition tools without being officially registered, making about 15,000 initiatives around the world with up to 100.000 additional people involved in the movement. The network has preferred to consider anyone actively using transition tools an informal member. However, there are also official members fulfilling certain criteria (Transition network 2013). As of September 2013, there were 1130 registered initiatives in 43 countries, including 462 official initiatives and 654 mulling (candidates). The official membership with conditions was adopted to assure the TN trustees and funders that while the network actively nurtures embryonic projects, only communities that are considered ready to move into the awareness raising stage will be promoted to official status.

#### 3.3.1.2.1. Development of transition in Paide

The Transition network was not formally established in Estonia, and there were no mullers (candidates) or official members at the time of research. However, the TN considers using the Transition model the key criteria for belonging to the movement and Wabalinn Paide has openly used the tools offered by the TN since 2010, making it part of the movement (Wabalinn Paide 2013).

The initial impulse for the initiative was studying local history and protecting cultural heritage. Starting in 2003, the aim was to increase the knowledge and appreciation of the cultural heritage of Paide. Slowly the focus shifted from studying and protecting cultural heritage in the old town to learning skills for preserving and renovating the existing buildings. The old town was not in a good state, which led to the creation of the NGO Wabalinn Weissenstein, the latter being the historical name for Paide. In 2004 comprehensive development plan for the old town was crafted, which made the initiative an urban SD pioneer in the Estonian context. Soon, the local branch of the Information Centre for Sustainable Renovation (ICSR) and the local volunteer centre in Paide were opened.

To make a practical difference, the core group started organising sustainable renovation courses for Paide house owners in a building granted by the town for the ICSR. Teaching sustainable renovation led to jointly renovating this building with volunteers, creating a public space which later developed into a community centre. So the focus shifted again, to creating and maintenance of urban community. The ICSR building developed into a lively meeting place for the urban community.

Mobilising people, and balancing between regular jobs and volunteering to prevent burnout, became an issue and along with opening of ICSR made it possible for the initiator and visionary of the movement Rainer Eidemiller to start relocalising his life to Paide. By actively participating and writing national as well as EU projects related for example to sustainable building, use of herbs or preservation of cultural heritage, there was no financial shortage.

At the time of research, the initiative had about 25 active members. Daily work involved offering a place and worthwhile reasons for meetings, publishing a local newsletter to spread the word and offering reskilling help from learning how to renovate houses to relearning how to grow food in the big backyards long dominated by lawn. Cooperation with local municipality and businesses, as well as other communities and citizen initiatives in Estonia had become regular by the time of research.

The Transition model was introduced to the initiative in 2009 and welcomed as a useful approach fitting very well with the direction chosen by the Paide initiative. The practical Transition ideas and approaches used in Paide include urban gardening to revive local food production, creating

the visions of Paide´s development based on EDAP community planning model to revise the initial development plan from 2004, and implementing the local currency P.A.I. (acronym for Instrument for Developing Paide) with some success (Wabalinn Paide 2013).

The impact of the initiative has been significant in Paide through its various fields of action from sustainable renovation and volunteer centre to creating a bike park, local food club, art gallery, further educational centre, local EDAP and the alternative currency P.A.I. to recognise local volunteers.

#### 3.3.1.2.2. Development of Transition Town Freiburg

The German-speaking transition network called Transition Netzwerk D/A/CH was well established and active in Germany at the time of research (Transition network 2013b, German Transition network 2013) and the initiative in Freiburg was among the most active in Germany. At the time of research participants estimated that there were about 50-75 Transition initiatives in Germany and about 20 in Austria and Switzerland. Only seven among them were official and about 40-50 groups were active in different stages of becoming official. After being in the initial mulling phase at the beginning of the research, the initiative became an official full member of the Transition network during the study period (Transition network 2014).

The Freiburg transition initiative Freiburg in Wandel was a member of the Transition network since 2010. The initiative began when the initiator HF received information about the movement from one of his schoolteachers. He became the local contact person for the initiative on the international transition web page. The initial group formation phase was very slow with many people interested, but not willing to take responsibility for initiating a group. The first face-to-face meeting took place only at the end of 2010 with 10-15 people. Since spring 2011 regular events and meetings were taking place, including public film evenings with a discussion at the end. Public interest in the holistic approach of the transition model was big.

The initiative recognised the relevance of support from the governance and municipalities, but they were not waiting for solutions from politics, or technology, they didn´t believe that resource and climate problems can be solved with power. Instead, they stress empowering the civil society and valuing the contribution of each person: "*We need experts and politicians, but the citizens themselves have considerable potential of untapped creative power and their own visions"* (TTFreiburg 2011).

Freiburg followed the original Transition Town model including awareness rising around the dual challenge of climate change and peak oil. In addition to the core group there were a number of active subgroups focusing on transition in terms of food, family, fair economy, public relations, sewing, urban gardening, and the heart and soul group focusing on introspection and sharing. In addition, there were several internal working groups and close links to other local organisations in Freiburg active in the field of community supported agriculture, permaculture, renewable energies and deep ecology.

#### 3.3.1.2.3. Development of Transition Telheiras

Transition movement in Portugal was rather well established with 14 initiatives altogether, including three official transition initiatives in Porto, Leiria and Portalegre (Transition network 2012b). Further eleven initiatives were mullers (candidates) during the study phase. Both urban and rural initiatives were included.

At the time of research the case study initiative Iniciativa de Transição em Telheiras, located in the Telheiras district of Lisbon, was a member of the Transition Network (Transition network 2013c, Telheiras initiative 2012) with muller status and approximately 25 members. It was one of the projects supported by the seasoned Local Residents Association ART (*Associação de Residentes de*

*Telheiras)*. The core group consisted of four three local students working for building up the movement.

The first inspiration for the movement stems from 2007, when these core group members went on a train-trip through Europe together. During this trip they met many new people, had interesting talks and were inspired. Once they got back home they decided that they want more community in their district as well and began making a difference with small activities. The initiative reformed to Transition Telheiras in 2011 after hearing about Transition network in 2010 and having some members visit the training for transition.

Since 2011 Transition Telheiras had been organising different types of regular and irregular meetings and events for both general public and people wanting to co-organize transition activities. Their activities included organising public film evenings and discussion evenings, DIY reskilling workshops, garden workshops as well as creating and maintaining community garden, events for sharing experiences and know-how with other activists, and monthly gatherings for presenting the different Portuguese permaculture, ecovillage and transition projects to locals. Interest from local people was great.

Cooperation with other civil initiative groups, most notably other transition and permaculture groups in Portugal, and with the local municipality was functioning well with several joint projects in planning. One good example of cooperation between the district governance and the initiative was an on-going project for changing the traffic regulations to decrease the speed limit in order to make the streets safer and friendlier for the local inhabitants again.

The core group members were motivated by the shared positive vision of the future. As the initiative had been successful in public, the team was proud of their achievements and motivated to continue. There was a dream of doing an EDAP, but it was believed that raising awareness and gathering interested people first is a smart choice before starting community planning. Another plan was to start social enterprises to provide more opportunities to work in the district. However, as the core group members were all students, there was no certainty on what will happen after they graduate.

### 3.3.1.3. Development of the Let's do it! network

The Let's do it! initiative is a collective voluntary movement that has described itself as one of the fastest-expanding civic movements in history (Let's do it World 2012).

The idea of the movement was born in October 2007 in Estonia. Two men, a biologist, Estonian Parliament member and long-time director of the Estonian Fund for Nature (ELF) Toomas Trapido and a businessman and a board member of ELF Rainer Nõlvak were tired of seeing garbage piles in nature and decided to do something to change it[9]. Trapido had thought about cleaning Estonia in three to five years, but Nõlvak proposed that it should be done in one day to create a special feeling of cooperation and empowerment, which would also make the people used to littering aware of the problem they are creating. The idea spread fast and within a few weeks, a core group of over 20 active citizens had formed. The enthusiastic, well-motivated team with professional expertise in different fields from communication and marketing to innovative software solutions, proved successful. In May 2008 the first event took place – over 50.000 Estonians came together to get rid of 10.000 tons of illegal garbage from roadsides, forests and towns, cleaning the entire country in 5 hours on a voluntary basis. Many people from around the world participated in the first Estonian cleanup day Teeme ära! 2008 (Let's do it! 2008) and the international media was following the ambitious volunteer action, spreading news of the event around the globe. The short video about the action inspired people in

[9] The names of the initiators of the networks are public knowledge freely available in the info materials; as such they are not anonymised like the names of the individual case study respondents.

many different countries to organize massive cleanup actions to clean their home countries. The initiative became international already in its first year with Latvia and Lithuania organising their national clean-ups in May and September.

In January 2010 Let's do it! Conference took place in Tallinn, Estonia, to inform the interested parties and encourage nations to organise their own clean-up days. At the same time the ambitious plan of a World Cleanup campaign was born, initiated in 2011 hand in hand with hundreds of volunteers, NGOs, many other groups and organizations**.** In 2011 also the European Parliament endorsed the plan with a decree, paving the way to national governments support of the initiative. In 2011 also the Let's Do It Foundation as the legal body was created to support the cooperative efforts and represent the movement in dealings with their international partners and make it possible to become an accredited member of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (LDIW 2014).

In 2011 the Let's Do It! movement initiated the ambitious global volunteer action: the perparations for the Let´s do it! World Cleanup 2012 (LDIW). The cleanup consisted of a series of local, national and regional cleanup events running from spring to autumn and bringing millions of people together. In 2013 the next World Cleanup, as well as a virtual cleanup and preparations for a regional Mediterranean cleanup took place. As part of the virtual cleanup, two computer games were developed, accessible to both old and young: "World cleanup simulation" and "Clean up your brain". In 2014 the actions continued as global and regional cleanups. Under the slogan of "*Join the biggest cleanup action our planet has ever seen. Is your country on board? Check it out and be an active part of a real change*", the next LDI World Cleanup 2014 took place.

According the LDI web page, the movement gained between September 2013 to September 2014 five new participating countries and over 3 million new participants. By the end of 2014 the movement had spread to 112 countries with over 11 million volunteers participating. Most of the participating groups are campaign-based, coming together to organise this specific event once a year, but there were also more stable citizen groups in 18 countries, including in Portugal and Estonia. The table below provides an overview of the local initiatives in case study countries from the beginning of the movement in 2008 to the end of 2014. As seen from the table, the idea of doing the clean-ups in one day had not been realised and the countries had chosen a fixed campaign period yearly: early May in Estonia, the second half of March in Portugal, and the second half of September in Germany.

**Table 11. Overview of the LDI! initiatives in Estonia, Germany and Portugal from 2008 to 2014.**

| Country | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **EE** | Estonia 03.05. 2008 (All day, entire country) | Let's Do It! My Estonia Brainstorming Day | Teeme Ära! (All day, entire country) | Teeme Ära! 07.05.2011 (All day, entire country) | Teeme Ära! 05.05.2012 (All day, entire country) | Teeme Ära! 04.05.2013 (All day, entire country) | Teeme Ära! 03.05.2014 (All day, entire country) |
| **DE** | | | | Preparations started | Germany 21.09.2012 (All day)<br><br>Karlsruhe 12.05.2012 (2 hours) | Karlsruhe 21.09.2013 (All day)<br><br>Riverside of Weser River 25.05.2013 (All day) | Rothenburg, 21.09.2014 (All day) |
| **PT** | | | Limpar Portugal 20.03.2010 (All day) | AMO Portugal 19-20.3.2011 | AMO Portugal 24.03.2012 (All day) | AMO Portugal 24.03.2013 (All day) | |

In order to reach a transformative change in the global society, the movement set the ambitious goal of involving 350 million people by the 2018 World Cleanup. This makes around 5% of the world's population and it is believed that this is the amount of people needed to create a lasting change.

By 2015, the network had over 14 million participants from 112 countries working together for cleaning up the planet from illegally dumped solid waste and keeping it clean. In several countries, e.g. Portugal, Albania, Moldova and Bulgaria, LDI became the biggest civic initiative and in some cases, the first big public voluntary movement ever.

#### 3.3.1.3.1. Development of Let's do it! in Estonia

In Estonia, the nation-wide action days have taken place yearly since 2008 under the name of Teeme ära! (Let's do it!). The movement was born in 2007 when initiators met while cleaning Tabasalu Nature Park near Tallinn. They decided to do something about the habit of littering. They had been occasionally cleaning up around their home areas, because even though the local municipality also did a good job, there were still plastic bags, drinking cups and cigarette packs lying around. One of the suggested to clean up Estonia in a couple of years, but the other suggested that in order to gather momentum, it should be done much faster. So the idea of a nation-wide cleanup day attracting a lot of attention, drawing awareness on the problem and helping to clean up the country, was born. Soon, they gathered a group of volunteers to coordinate the teams across the country.

Much trash was cleaned up already in the first cleanup on 3rd of May 2008 when over 50,000 people came out of their homes to clean up Estonia, and the rest followed the process via media channels. The aim of cleaning up 10 000 tons of waste was met within 5 hours. 50,000 participants makes 4% out of a population of 1,3 million, which would equal 15,3 million in the USA or 57 million in India (LDIW 2014c). The first cleanup had a positive impact on Estonian environment, civil society and most of the illegal trash was removed from the streets, beaches and forests. In 2008, the number of participants was so high because the core team organised a massive communication campaign, featuring well-known actors, musicians and opinion leaders supporting the movement and talking about the problem. Participation was made as easy by providing the participants with a plastic bag, a pair of gloves and a limited area to clean up, meaning that everything was arranged.

For the organisers, team building was the first step, a team comprising top professionals from a wide range of fields was assembled, eventually growing up to 620 people. Professionalism and including top players in advertisement and marketing helped to build up momentum and contributed vitally to the success of the events. Outreach was the next step, the team reached out to people, NGOs, municipalities, politicians and opinion leaders, eventually gathering over 500 partners. Also the President of Estonia supported the project, taking it under his patronage. This helped to secure a wide participation base. Using the Google Earth software, the team developed a virtual waste mapping tool to locate the illegal trash sites and estimated the type and amount of garbage there. People were called to use this virtual waste mapping application to co-create an overview of the trashed areas (LDIW 2013a).

Encouraged by the success of the first year, other formats of civil action have been tested by the LDi initiative to improve local life beyond clean-up campaigns and support a strong civil society in Estonia by promoting proactive attitude, strengthening local communities and supporting the development of local leaders. Because much was achieved in the first year, the need for a trash clean-up had decreased by 2009, which meant that the attention starting to turn towards alternative actions including community brainstorming, reviving and renovating public spaces and community buildings, building playgrounds and other similar shared facilities. So in 2009 the Let's Do It! My Estonia Brainstorming Day (Teeme Ära Minu Eesti Mõttetalgud) was organised to encourage people all over Estonia to come together and talk about things they wanted to change in their local neighbourhoods,

and also how to improve the whole Estonia. All in all, 12.000 people participated, 4830 ideas were added to the public idea bank for everybody to read, comment on and join in. The 23 actual projects resulting from the brainstorming can be seen in the deed bank. The participant numbers show that this shift in focus from physical cleanups to cooperative reflexion and actions was not immediately accepted: the brainstorming day gathered only 12 000 volunteers. Also in the following years attention was given to coming together and fixing things like children's playground or community centres.

In May 2010, a cleanup was organised again with 31 299 people (2,27% of the population) participating and working for the common good in 1130 different places across Estonia. In the light of the major success of the first clean-up which activated 4% of the population (this has remained the highest participant number thus far), it became obvious that alternative actions to physical clean-ups decreased participant numbers. However, as both options are offered, the number of participants has been increasing again, e.g. in 2013 there were 36 270 volunteers taking part of the clean-ups. By 2015 the LDI clean-ups had become a regular spring event in Estonia with a stable participant base. As a participant put it: *"The numbers of volunteers have been growing again, I am sure we have a long and active future ahead of us"* (ML, female, 30s). Between 2008 and 2015 over 160 000 volunteers participated in Estonian LDI actions altogether.

Success of the movement prompted the idea of World Cleanup in 2010. Organising the Let´s do it! World Cleanup in 2012 sky-rocketed the LDI to a global movement with millions of participants across the world, joining the growing (often virtual) community of like-minded people eager to make a difference and change the wasteful way of life. Good teamwork, well-connected professionals, the LDI spirit and a shared goal, can be considered the keys to the success of the Estonian initiative, and growing out from this, the international LDI initiative: *"Our cooperation is based on shared interest, sense of responsibility for the world. There is no reason to stop, and the work flows when the team is unanimous"* (KE, female, 20s).

To facilitate the spreading of the initiative, a model for organising the clean-ups was created and made available for free at the LDI web page to support new initiatives. The approaching World Cleanup 2012 required coordination, encouraging and advising of the growing international network. Many of the coordinators responsible for different regions across the globe were still Estonians, which caused an increasing lack of time for the local initiative. With successful campaigns in 2008, 2009 and 2010, it had become customary that every spring people were invited to organise and participate in collective voluntary actions to make a difference and improve the quality of local life by cleaning up, building or renovating playgrounds or community buildings or brainstorming to improve their neighbourhood. So it was not difficult for the LDI Foundation to give the organisation of the Estonian clean-ups over to the Estonian Fund for Nature (ELF) team, who has coordinated the initiative ever since. For the 26.001 people participating in 969 places all over the country this organisational transition in 2011 remained invisible.

Part of the success of this initiative is that since the beginning, the campaign was organised by professionals from different fields. The custom-made software solutions helped map and locate the garbage all over the country, while professional marketing and communication teams gathered support and helped to raise the momentum. Awareness raising before the event included inviting well-known people, such as popular singers, to comment on littering. Over the years also the presidents and government members have participated in the clean-ups to show their support, adding to its popularity. For example, in 2012 and 2013 the then Estonian president Toomas-Hendrik Ilves participated in the cleanup and in autumn 2013, during the state visit to Romania, the LDI movement served as a bridge joining countries where the movement had made a positive impact.

Over the years the voluntary clean-ups have saved the government millions of Euros. The international success of the LDI movement has become a part of Estonian success story of being

small, but smart and effective. Consequently, the movement has enjoyed political support and secured stable cooperation partners also from the business sector. For example, when the lobby work began in 2010 to have the European Parliament support the LDI World Cleanup 2012, the Estonian parliament member Indrek Tarand helped to mobilise further parliament members (Tarand 2010, 2011). On 12 May 2011 the written declaration of the European Parliament on "Cleanup in Europe" and "Let's do it World 2012" was approved, expressing support for the campaign (European Parliament 2011a, 2011b). The LDI movement was also part of the Estonian official presence in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 for the Rio+20 conference. Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet introduced the LDI World Cleanup 2012 campaign to the delegates at the discussion panel "The Future We Choose: Tipping the Scales Towards Global Sustainability" as an example of Estonia's successful civil society initiative. He invited everyone to participate in the cleanup action that took place on June 19, 2012 in Garota de Ipanema Park in Rio de Janeiro and participated himself as well. He commented on the World Cleanup by saying that if each of us does a bit, we can achieve a lot: *"The result will be a cleaner, better, and more sustainable world. This shows that if we have a strong will and combine our strength, we can change the world"* (Estonian Foreign Ministry 2012b). In 2013, the Estonian government continued to support the spread of the movement. The Foreign Ministry along with the Ministry of Environment also supported organising the LDI exhibition at the UN's headquarters in Geneva in 2013 celebrating the 6th anniversary of the initiative and nominated the LDI initiative for the UN peace prize for the World Cleanup actions in 2012 and 2013.

#### 3.3.1.3.2. Development of Let's do it! in Germany

The idea of starting a Let's do it! initiative in Germany was born in 2011, inspired by the approaching World Cleanup. A small number of people across the country had started to use the waste mapping application on the LDI webpage, but they were not connected to each other. In autumn 2011 I decided to become the local contact person for Germany to facilitate and observe the process. Numerous people took contact, but their interest was not stable and they did not want to participate in organisation. Slowly a core team started to assemble and prepare for the first World Cleanup in 2012. The core team consisted of three people from Germany, one from Estonia and one from Latvia.

During the first months of 2012 I gave the role of a contact person over to one core team member to remain an observing participant in the general organisation team. However, I continued to look for contacts for the local Karlsruhe cleanup. Once I had established contact with the local Office for Waste Management and found an active citizen willing to lead the initiative, I resigned to the role of observing participant.

The core team was busy developing a concept for the cleanup, writing the manuals, contact forms for potential sponsors, role descriptions of regional coordinators, a communication plan and so on. The main question was: how to involve people as team members, participants and partners. To facilitate participation and keep things simple, the concept for Germany was to invite people to joint he cleanup for 1 hour. The motto was "Give Germany an hour" (Schenk Deutschland eine Stunde).

In 2012 many little clean-ups took place before and after the main event on the 21st of September. At first the idea was to organize the cleanup in the spring as a spring cleanup, partnering up with existing cleanup actions, but when the local authorities in Karlsruhe blocked this opportunity as they did not want it to compete with their exisiting cleanup brand, the decision was made to have the main nation-wide cleanup in September.

The first German nation-wide clean-up in 2012 brought together about 100 people who cleaned up their neighborhoods in Berlin, Bochum, Hamburg, Karlsruhe, Leipzig and Munich. In 2013 approximately 50 people participated, and approximately another 100 joined in to think how to improve the city environment regarding waste when visiting in the information tent in Karlsruhe.

The Karlsruhe case provides an example of an attempt to build up a more stable structure for the initiative. This was due to the existence of a dedicated leader motivated to develop a system of local volunteers to keep the city clean. In Karlsruhe three cleanups took place from 2012 to 2013 under the LDI banner and the most people participated in Germany. The LDI movement motivated the creation of a network of likeminded as the Citizen Association Clean Karlsruhe (BASK – BürgerAktion Sauberes Karlsruhe) on the World Cleanup day in 2012 (BASK 2013). BASK was created to facilitate cooperation between the citizens and municipality, and for organization LDI cleanups:

> *"I experience again and again that there are many people who clean up their neighbourhoods independently and nobody knows that. As the municipality has no human resources to coordinate this and I wanted to know who does what and where, I created the BASK"* (ED, male, 70s).

The initiative succeeded partnering with local bakery, cultural centre, local district church and associations to achieve its goals.

However, by 2014 the initiative had become inactive as keeping the initiative active was a lot of work. The initiator retired due to health reasons and my fieldwork phase ended. The Karlsruhe case was exceptional as the team succeeded in sequring media attention by giving interviews to local TV, radio and newspapers, and visiting the deputy mayor responsible for environmental issues to discuss possible improvements. Almost all other locations remained under the media radar which is part of the reason, why the initiative struggled with finding participants and supporters despite the decree from the European Parliament.

By 2015 about 250 volunteers participated in the LDI Germany events. This means that the cleanups in Germany have been happening on a much smaller scale than in neighboring countries. Which are the reasons for the difficulties that the LDI initiative faced in Germany? The reasons for the small scale and limited impact of the initiative in Germany included communication and cooperation problems and fear for competition and uncertainty. The core team and local teams remained too small, people were scattered all over Germany and were not able to support each other as much as needed. There were too big expectations and too much to do, and too few people to do it all, which frustrated remaining members. Among the main reasons for the unsuccessful cooperation were the fear for commitment and unreliability. Fear of commitment meant that many people were unwilling to commit as it was difficult to see how much effort would be needed for this project to succeed. It was also suggested that many Germans are already quite engaged in "green" things, and they didn´t have energy for another initiative, especially when they heard that they would have to initiate the action by themselves. In the case of the municipalities, mentioning the decree from the European Parliament and the example of successful clean-ups in neighboring Austria and France helped. However, not having an official German organization behind the initiative decreased the reliability of the initiative and posed an obstacle by making cooperation more difficult. So the reliability issue probably played an important part in the development of the German initative. Creating the BASK as a legal body helped to overcome the reliability issues locally.

Speaking with local people in different settings showed that they were not content with the situation, but unwilling to clean up, arguing that somebody else should do it as they already pay taxes to have a clean environment. This was an example of people not sharing or understanding the LDI spirit. The team noticed that trash and dealing with it had a low status in Germany: *"I think that some people lack the confidence to say: Hi, I'm doing a trash project. I think people just don't like trash. Maybe because of hygiene or they just don´t want to get their fingers dirty. It´s not cool. Everybody wants to be green, but nobody wants to actually do it when it is dirty"* (AD, female, 20s).

The people who were interested we often expecting structures that are ready to use and were intimidated by the openness of the network and the fact that they were invited to build up the local

branches themselves. What hemmed the local waste disposal departments was fear for extra work or competition for their own cleanup brands.

The national core team was frustrated by the fact that their efforts did not bear much fruit. The German national group used the same options available to other teams for communication such as a separate webpage, a Facebook page, a German page on the LDI International webpage, an email list. However, they did not succeed to include many volunteers, networks and well-connected people to build a strong and lasting initiative. The participants felt that they had done their best, which had not been enough, and were to some extent perplexed and at loss, partly burned out. This led to the dissolution of the initial LDI Germany core group of by 2014. No coordinated county-wide activities had taken place since; instead different small actions had taken place across Germany with minimal to no contact between the organisers. The international LDI team making preparations for the next 2018 World Cleanup action were attempting to build up a new national team in Germany.

#### 3.3.1.2.3. Development of Let's do it! in Portugal

Interest in LDI movement started in Portugal in 2008 when a couple of friends from the city of Braga saw the video of the first 2008 LDI cleanup in Estonia. Inspired, the Clean Portugal Project (Projecto Limpar Portugal, PLP) was initiated in the first half of 2009.

The first National Volunteer Meeting of the PLP was held in July 2009 in the Municipal Library of Lousã, calling for the spirit of volunteerism and respect for nature, understood in the movement as LDI spirit. The creation a profile in the NING social media platform allowed the networking to start and helped interested people to find information and sign up for the event. The focus was on disseminating information about the cleanup and gradually establishing district coordination groups from North to South of Portugal.

The first cleanup Limpar Portugal on March 20$^{th}$ in 2010 focused on cleaning the forests and green spaces of improperly deposited trash. The first cleanup mobilized ca. 100,000 volunteers across Portugal who collected about 70 000 tons of waste "*to meet the spring with a much cleaner country*" (AMO Portugal 2014). Impact of the event was significant and support was granted from the civil society, businesses and governance levels, leaving thousands of participants pleased and wanting more. Almost four hundred short videos and more than 12,000 photographs were shared by the volunteers (Limpar Portugal NING page 2013).

So, the Portuguese initiative started with a highly successful cleanup campaign, resulting in a significantly cleaner environment and activating different groups across the social spectrum. It strengthened the civil society and communicated to the political elites that people wish them to pay more attention to environmental matters. Limpar Portugal was considered innovative as the joint effort towards common good was done on a voluntary basis using a giant network of municipal and district organisations with the support of new communication technologies. The use of internet enabled the creation of an online platform where volunteers had thousands of discussions associated with Limpar Portugal inviting volunteers and promoting reflection on various environmental topics. The campaign sparked synergy with several new environmental associations emerging and numerous activities at individual, school and association level that arose from this impulse.

After the first cleanup, the association AMO Portugal (Love Portugal) was created (AMO Portugal 2014, LDIW 2014b). It took over from Limpar Portugal as the official contact point and country team. The AMO Portugal team consisted of about seven members keeping the network loose, activating it for the yearly cleanups. Internet remained the main communication channel where local groups could announce their activities, negotiate with national and governmental partners, and ask for organisational help.

In 2010, the Portuguese delegation visited the first Let's do it! Conference in Tallinn in order to share experiences with delegates from other countries. Inspired by the Estonian example, the focus on physical clean-ups in Portugal started to shift in 2011 from the original aim of cleaning up the trash to awareness raising, environmental education and public debates. Instead of cleanup actions to clean up as much physical trash as possible by mobilizing as many people as possible, the new aim was to encourage reflection on the current lifestyle by promoting a more responsible attitude towards dealing with garbage[10]. Attempts to start a public debate were made by organising discussions in schools and universities, showing environmental documentaries, organizing local environmental workshops, promoting environmental education, outlining forest protection plans, and organising street actions. The vision was to replace cleaning by responsible action, preventing future environmental damage and rendering future cleanups unnecessary.

Despite the change in the overall focus, updating the garbage map to make the pollution visible and helping schools to organize small cleaning routes was on the agenda also in the later years, but no longer on a nation-wide scale. It meant that socio-cultural aspects gained importance, stressing the relevance of taking responsibility, utilising the LDI spirit of volunteerism and respect for nature. The focus on prevention and responsible action deepened in 2012 and 2013 (LDI Portugal 2014). The idea behind that shift was that it does not make sense to continue doing the work of the municipalities, once the municipalities have become aware of people's concern. Although the awareness raising and educational activities were also appreciated, many volunteers and the public lost interest, as they were left without the empowering experience of coming together and making a clearly visible difference.

Upon talking to participants to identify the reasons for this decline in interest, several weaknesses were outlined. It included too centralised and intransparent communiation once the AMO Portugal took over from Limpar Portugal whih had been experienced as the people's movement. Also, people expected a more stable network active all year round. When no stable network was established, many people were left longing for more cooperation and regularity, giving ground for critizising the leaders of Amo Portugal for doing the campaigns for personal fame, not for the community (LP, male, 50s). However, the main reason for the declining participant numbers seems to be that people expected the continuation of clean-ups. The shift in focus towards environmental education, awareness raising and public debate to change the root causes of littering and waste(fullness) was too fast and radical.

So despite the hopes of the organisers to engage more participants after the success of 2010, each year fewer people took part resulting in the initiative stopping its activities after 2013. Despite wide public acceptance and recognition from power structures, the organisational shortcoming coupled with the sharp shift in focus without providing a network for likeminded people alienated the supporters and proved fatal for the initiative.

Nevertheless, the Limpar Portugal initiative still has a positive image in Portugal. The interview partners from Transition Telheiras were enthusiastic about it and some other initiatives have used its logo to further their goals[11]. This might not be the end of the LDI movement in Portugal, as the international LDI team was looking for new team members to organise the Portuguese 2018 cleanup as part of the World Cleanup campaign at the time of research.

[10] While in Estonia both aspects were continually followed, the Portuguese movement largely abandoned physical clean-ups and almost exclusively began addressing the awareness raising issues.

[11] For example, the LDI logo was used when Florestar Portugal campaign aiming to reforest Portugal took place in November 2014 seeking to tap into the positive image of Limpar Portugal although it was not related to the LDI network. See http://www.amoportugal.org/pt/florestarportugal2014 (October 2014).

## 3.3.2. The governance level

For mapping the key developments in the rise of relevance of the sustainable development issues in the EU, the related developmental milestones in the EU, Estonia, Germany and Portugal are discussed below.

### 3.3.2.1. Environmentalism and SD scene in the European Union

**The rise of environmental agenda.** Environmental protection was not mentioned in the 1957 Treaty of Rome. The first environmental directive concerned with classification, packaging, and labelling of dangerous substances was adopted in 1967. However, it was not until the 1970s that the wide spreading environmental concerns triggered more substantial actions on the Community level (DG-EN 2002: 9-10). This development was largely influenced by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. At the following 1972 Paris European Summit the heads of state or government of the nine member states expressed their concern for the improvement of living conditions with the participation of various social partners, stating:

> *"Economic expansion is not an end in itself. Its first aim should be to enable disparities in living conditions to be reduced. It must take place with the participation of all the social partners. It should result in an improvement in the quality of life as well as in standards of living. As befits the genius of Europe, particular attention will be given to intangible values and to protecting the environment, so that progress may really be put at the service of mankind"* (Statement from the Paris Summit 1972).

Subsequently, the first Environment Action Programme (EAP) was adopted. In 1973 also the Environment and Consumer Protection Directorate was formed within the European Commission. Athough the European Green Party was founded only in 2004 (Schreurs and Papadakis 2009: 83), the greens first contested at the European Parliament elections already in 1979 (European Greens 2014a). Since then the green political movement has acted as a link between the governance and civil society levels in Europe.

In 1981 the Directorate-General for Environment, Nuclear Safety, and Civil Protection was established in the European Commission. 1987 was the European Year of the Environment, and a year when the Single European Act incorporated environmental policy into the Treaty of Rome, marking a turning point for the environment in the EU policymaking. This meant introducing the new idea that environmental protection requirements shall be a component in the Community's other policies.

The next milestones in 1992 included the adoption of the first EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action LIFE I, beginning of the EU eco-label scheme, and establishment of the eco-management and audit scheme EMAS. In 1993 the Treaty on the European Union, also known as the Maastricht Treaty, entered into force and gave environmental action the status of an EU policy as Article 130r. This added sustainable and non-inflationary growth respecting the environment to the European Community's tasks and wrote the precautionary principle into the article on environment. It also upgraded actions relating to the environment to the status of a policy in its own right. In 1994 the European Environment Agency (EEA) was formally established. The Treaty of Amsterdam, which entered into force in 1999, enshrined the principle of sustainable development in Article 2, making environmental policy a key political objective of the EU. The clause calling for environmental protection requirements to be integrated into the definition and implementation of other policies, which had been in Article 130r, was placed in Article 6.

The EU has also been active in regards to climate change. Most notably, it signed the Kyoto Protocol in 1998, set up its Emission Trading Scheme in 2005 and has agreed to unilaterally cut its

emissions by 20% by 2020. There are four Directorates-General dealing with environmental issues in the European Commission: Directorate-General for Climate Action, Directorate-General for Energy, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, and Directorate-General for the Environment.

Considering all this, the EU has grounds for stating that major progress has been made over the last 40 years in establishing environmental interests in the EU (DG-EN 2002: 8).

**Development of the EU sustainable development scene.** After the Rio Summit in 1992, only a few European countries included SD and Local Agenda 21 (LA21) in their development plans. The first efforts to promote sustainability across EU include the Aalborg Process, which began in 1994, as well as three major successive European urban sustainability campaigns: the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign, the Sustainable Cities Award, and the European Green Capital.

To encourage change towards sustainable development, the European Commission launched a global initiative and gathered the first pan-European conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns in the municipality of Aalborg in 1994. This marked the beginning of the Aalborg Process, consisting of the Aalborg Charter (1994-2003), the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign (ESCTC), and the Aalborg Commitments, adopted in 2004 (Sustainable cities platform 2014). At the time of research, more than 2,500 local governments from over 40 countries had signed the Aalborg Charter (UN Sustainable Development 2014). With the help of Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), the ESCTC running from 1994 to 2003 was the largest European initiative for urban sustainability. Aiming to translate the Rio outcomes into practice and mainstream local sustainability throughout Europe, it helped to generate wider political support for sustainable policies and the implementation of the LA21 (especially Chapter 28) and the Aalborg Charter. At the Aalborg+10 sustainability conference in 2004, the Aalborg Commitments were adopted. As a set of shared voluntary commitments to be jointly implemented by local governments across Europe they aim to inspire and engage European cities to work seriously and responsibly for local SD (Aalborg plus 2014). The aim was to regenerate momentum in order to move from agenda to action over the next ten years. Following the LA21, one of the fundamental principles of the Aalborg Commitments is that local sustainable development is only possible in a participatory and democratic process and in close partnership with stakeholders and citizens, so that they become an integral part of the solutions. Over 650 local governments from 35 countries had signed the Aalborg Commitments (Aalborg plus 2014) at the time of research, making them one of the most widely used urban sustainability tools on the governance level. While Spain had the most signatories with over 300 municipalities participating, Portugal was the most active country among the research participants at the time of research with 57 participating municipalities and two applicants, while Germany had 9 and Estonia 5 participating municipalities (Aalborg plus 2014).

Almost simultaneously to ESCTC, the Sustainable Cities Award was initiated by the EU in 1996 and ran until 2003. The aim was to offer international recognition to European local authorities for their sustainable urban development efforts, encourage exchange of experiences, raise public awareness and inspire communities and local authorities to implement the highlighted best practices (European Sustainable Cities Platform 2014). The award was given on four occasions to seventeen cities, from the case study countries only German cities received it: in 1997 and 2003 Heidelberg and in 1999 Munich.

After the ESCTC and the Sustainable Cities Award were both discontinued in 2003, the European Green Capital Award was conceived in the so-called Tallinn Memorandum in 2006 for rewarding leading cities for their efforts to improve the environment, the economy, and the quality of life of growing urban populations through concrete activities (European Commission 2006). It was launched in 2008 and the first award was assigned in 2010. Among the research participants only one

city received the prize up to 2015: Hamburg was the European Green Capital of the year in 2011 (European Commission 2015).

**EU sustainable development policies.** The main tools for introducing, implementing, and assessing SD-related actions in Europe have been the Sustainable Development Strategies (SDS's) and their reviews. The general agreement for preparing National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS) integrating and harmonizing economic, social and environmental policies was made in Rio in 1992 (see Chapter 8 of the LA21). The agreement of drawing up NSDS's in time for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development to meet the responsibility that the signatories of the 1992 UN Rio Declaration committed themselves, was made at the 19th Special Session of the UN General Assembly in 1997 (EU SDS 2001: 2).

Data from two reliable SD databases, the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN 2014) and United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform (UN SD Knowledge Platform 2013) clearly shows that the extent of interest and activities in SD-issues on the governance level varies greatly across European countries. There were only five forerunner countries that created NSDS´s to directly implement the results of the 1992 Earth Summit and the Agenda 21: Sweden (1994), the UK (1994), Switzerland (1997), Ireland (1997) and Luxemburg (1999)[12]. To facilitate the process of producing national strategies both OECD (2001) and UN (2002) produced practical guidelines. The majority of EU members (25) adopted their first NSDS's in the 2000s, including Germany (2002), Estonia (2005), and Portugal (2007). Belgium und Bulgaria were still developin their NSDS-s at the time of research. Figure 7 provides an overview.

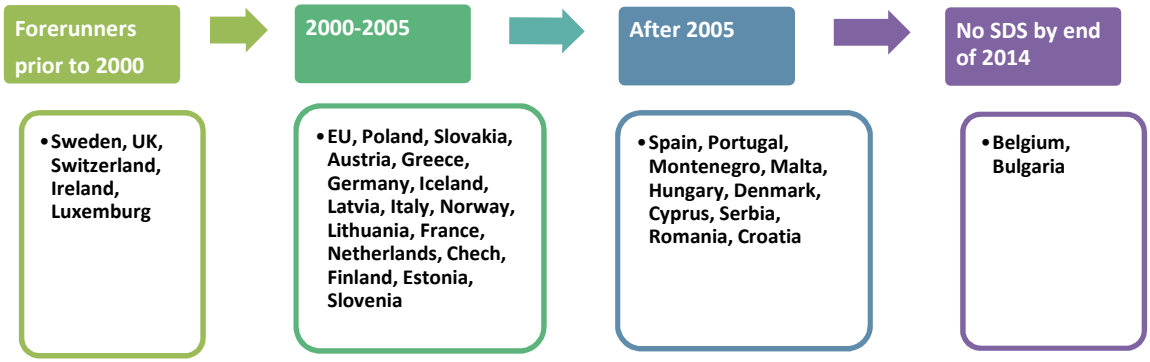



**Figure 7. Overview of the adoption of SDS in Europe from 1994 to 2014.**

**European Union's Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) and its renewal.** As indicated above, SD became a fundamental objective of the EU in 1997 when it was included in the Treaty of Amsterdam as an *"overarching objective of all EU policies"* (European Commission 2014a). In 1997 also the preparations for the first EU SDS began. Launched at the Gothenburg Summit in June 2001, the strategy set goals for the next 30 years (Europea Commission Communication 2002). Launching the EU SDS formed part of EU's preparations for the 2002 WSSD, held in Johannesburg.

With the enlargement of the EU to 25 Member States, increased instability due to migration crisis, terrorism, further globalization and changes in the world economy, the world surrounding the EU changed significantly after 2001. Despite important achievements in implementing the EU SDS, unsustainable trends persisted, ranging from climate change to aging societies in developed countries and a widening gap between the rich and the poor (European Commission 2014a). Thus a SDS with a stronger focus, a clearer division of responsibilities, wider ownership and broader support basis, and more effective implementation and monitoring was deemed necessary by the Commission for tackling

[12] Since then all five countries have made revisions to their existing strategies or prepared new strategies.

the shortcomings and taking into account the new challenges. Public consultation on the SDS was running from August to October 2004. Despite limited success in achieving the SD goals set in the initial strategy, the EU had done enough to consider itself a global leader in shaping SD policies (Barry 2004: 165, EC Press Release 2013) and accordingly, a stronger integration of the international dimension was written into the EU's renewed SDS.

The renewed EU SDS was adopted by heads of state and governments at the Brussels European Council in June 2006 for the period 2005-2010 (Council of the European Union 2006). The commitments made at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and the Millennium Development Goals agreed in 2000, as well as global pledges to increase official development aid and to take account of the needs of developing countries in international trade, formed the core of the EU's sustainable development policies for this second period (EC 2014a).

**EU SDS: reviews and reports.** To raise the effectiveness of implementation in this second phase, monitoring and follow-up actions were considered crucial for effective implementation of the strategy. To ensure this, the renewed SDS contained a stronger governance cycle with a plan that every two years starting from 2007 the Commission would produce a progress report on the implementation of the strategy, based on bi-annual reports of the member states on how they address the EU SDS priorities. This progress report was to form the basis for discussion at the European Council, which in turn would guide the next steps in implementation. In October 2007 the European Commission adopted the first "Progress Report on the Sustainable Development Strategy 2007". The Eurostat monitoring report (Eurostat 2007) based on an extended set of SD indicators, served as inputs for the first progress report. The report stated that although progress achieved on the ground had been modest, great advances in EU and member state policy development had occurred in some of the seven key priorities identified in the revised SDS, in particular climate change, clean energy and health (European Commission 2007). According to the report, the significant progress on policy development had not yet translated into substantial concrete action.

However, the bi-annual reports have not been produced as planned, also by the majority of member states; especially noticeable is the downfall since 2009. From the case study countries, Portugal has submitted one report (in 2009, the one in 2011 remained unpublished), Estonia two reports in 2007 and 2009, and Germany three reports in 2004, 2008, 2012, plus two peer reviews in 2009 and 2013 (ESDN 2014).

In 2009 the European Commission put together an overview of the progress towards the goals and adopted the review "Mainstreaming sustainable development into EU policies: 2009 Review of the European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development" (European Commission 2009). It underlined that in recent years the EU had mainstreamed sustainable development into a broad range of its policies and claimed that the EU had taken the lead in the fight against climate change and the promotion of a low-carbon economy (EUR-Lex 2013). The review also launched a reflection on the future of the EU SDS and its relation to the Lisbon strategy. It concluded that as unsustainable trends persist in many areas, the efforts need to be intensified:

> *"However, progress in sustainable development still needs to be made and the Review opens a discussion on how the strategy can be improved. It should be better coordinated with other European policy strategies, particularly with the Lisbon Strategy on Growth and Jobs. The implementation of the strategy should be streamlined in order to improve its management and its actual results."* (EUR-Lex 2013)

The review was complemented by the next Eurostat's bi-annual monitoring report on SD. In addition, the Swedish EU Council Presidency drew up a Presidency Report, admitting a number of

unsustainable trends requiring urgent action, and emphasising that the EU SDS will continue to provide a long-term vision and constitute the overarching policy framework for all Union policies and strategies (Council of the European Union 2009).

However, despite admitting to modest progress on the ground and a number of persisting unsustainable trends requiring urgent action, the 2009 EU SDS review has remained the last. The strategy has not been renewed since it expired in 2010 and information about it has been archived on the EU's legislation pages (EUR-Lex 2013). In their Conclusions on Rio+20 in October 2012 the EU Environment Council laid down that the EU SDS should be reviewed as soon as possible, in 2014 at the latest. Despite the urgent rhetoric, this had not happened by the end of 2014. Instead, a follow-up to the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs was adopted in June 2010, known as "Europe 2020" (EC 2010a).

On the basis of the Presidency Report, the European Council reaffirmed in December 2009 that SD remains a fundamental EU objective under the Lisbon Treaty (The European Council 2009) and that the strategy will continue to form the overarching political framework for all EU policies and strategies. The heads of state and government decided that priority actions should be more clearly specified in future reviews, governance should be reinforced and clearer links should be made to the Europe 2020 (European Commission 2014b) strategy and other cross-cutting strategies. Figure 8 sums up the SD-related milestones in the EU from 2001-2015.

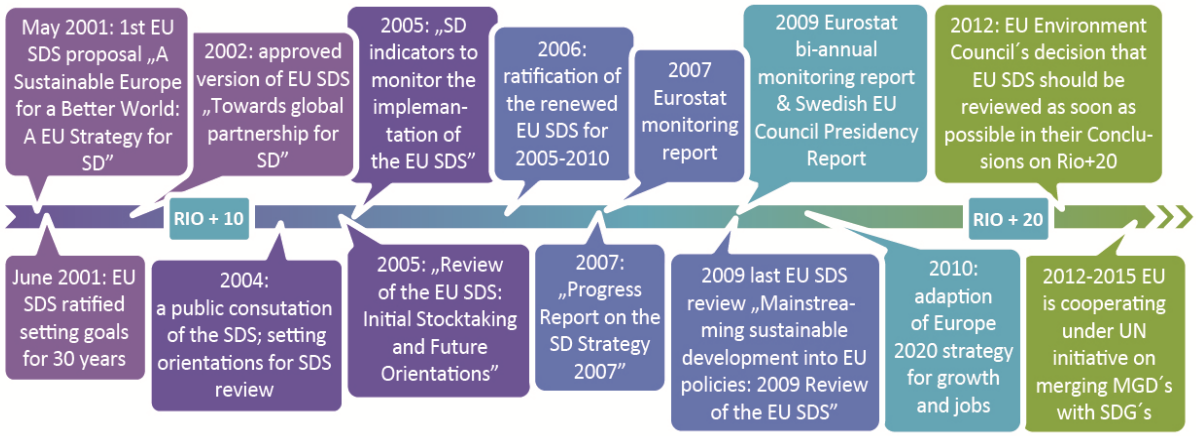



**Figure 8. The key SD-related milestones in the EU between 2001 and 2015.**

### 3.3.2.2. Environmentalism and SD scene in Estonia

**The rise of environmental agenda.** It has been argued that throughout the twentieth century Estonia experienced "*an unheralded, yet quietly significant history as a nature conservation actor*" (Galbreath 2010: 49), despite being stymied by the rigid Soviet occupation for decades. In 2010 the official nature conservation in Estonia celebrated its 100th anniversary, counting from the founding of the first protected area. Governmental institutional nature protection dates back to 1935 when the National Parks Administration was founded and the first Nature Conservation Act entered into force during the first Estonian Republic (Estonian Ministry of Environment 2013a). In 1938 the Administration was renamed to Institute of Nature Protection and Tourism. In 1957, the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic´s Council of Ministers established the Nature Protection Administration, and the new Nature Conservation Act was adopted, making it possible to place threatened species under protection and prescribe criminal liability for the violation of nature protection requirements. In the early 1960s a common system of forest management and nature protection was established. In 1966 the Nature Protection Administration was reorganised into Ministry of Forestry and Nature Conservation. In

1988, the Estonian Nature Protection and Forest Management Committee was established, and in 1989 it was renamed into its current form as the Ministry of the Environment.

Environmentalism was a strong force behind the nationalist movements before regaining Estonian independence and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union (Galbreath 2010, Vihma 2011). The contemporary Estonian green movement has its roots in the environmental protest in the mid-1980s. In 1987 the Soviet central government started preparations for large-scale phosphate mining in North-Eastern Estonia. The plans triggered a widespread peaceful protest movement among the population, known locally as the Phosphorus War. While phosphate mining would have inflicted irreparable damage on the environment, also ethnic identity concerns featured high on the agenda of the protest movement (Galbreath 2010: 73). The Soviet model of industrial development had paid little attention to the environment and had been based on the influx of labour from the rest of the Soviet Union, mostly Russia. Such policies were seen as detrimental to both Estonian natural environment and national identity.

The Estonian Green Movement was formally founded in 1988 as an environmental non-profit organization. Registered by the governance structures of the Soviet Estonia in September 1989, it was the first alternative to the Communist Party since Estonia's occupation in 1944. This made the Estonian Green Movement the first alternative party allowed in Estonia after sixty years of Soviet occupation. Already in 1989 the Estonian Green Movement joined the pan-European organization of European Greens (European Greens 2014a). The main activities of the movement included campaigns to clean up after the Soviet Army, peaceful demonstrations against the occupying forces and biking expeditions to areas affected by environmental degradation to raise awareness. During its heyday, the Green Movement gained national importance when it insisted in 1988 that the Chair of Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic's Council of Ministers would step down within 60 days, which also happened, though it remains unclear to what extent this resulted from their demand (Toomla 1999: 222). In their first elections in 1990, the success of the green party was great with eight seats from 67 in the parliament of the Soviet Estonia. The greens were also successful in advocating a moratorium on using nuclear energy in Estonia and adopting an ecosystem-based environmental protection system. However, after the phosphorus mining plan was cancelled and national independence regained, the political wing of the green movement fell apart (Galbreath 2010: 73), and has remained unstable ever since. The non-political wing has continued successfully, and has for example continued to organise the LDI clean-ups in Estonia since the original team focused on international development.

Upon regaining independence in the early 1990s Estonia had to cope with contemporary environmental challenges in the context of political and economic reorientation and building up of state structures. Becoming EU member candidate speeded up the process of harmonizing existing legislation with the Habitats Directive. The Ministry of the Environment has served to ensure the sparing use of natural resources and establish conditions ensuring "*a natural environment rich in species and a clean living environment both for our generation and the future generations*" (Estonian Ministry of Environment 2013b). It also served as the lead partner when Estonia first developed its SD-position, resulting later in the creation of the Estonian national sustainable development strategy (NSDS).

**Development of the SD scene in Estonia.** The legal basis for SD in Estonia is provided by the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia which entered into force in 1992 and states that the natural wealth and resources of Estonia are national riches, which must be used sparingly (Estonian Ministry of Environment 2013a); and the Estonian Sustainable Development Act from 1995 (Sustainable Development Act 1995), based on the Agenda 21 action programme adopted in 1992 in Rio. These

documents create a basis for long-term planning in energy, transport, agriculture, forestry, tourism, chemical industry, building materials industry and food industry sectors (Statistics Estonia 2013).

In 1996 a working group of experts in sustainable development was assembled into the Estonian Commission on Sustainable Development (NCSD) to serve as an advisory body to the government (Estonian Government Office 2013a, 2013b). The task of the Commission was to analyse the state policy on SD matters and make proposals to the state and local government institutions ensuring synergy of different development dimensions. Additionally, the Commission had the right to propose drafting legislation and organising research on the subject. Experts from national ministries and other governmental institutions participated in this Commission and under their guidance the "Estonian Sustainable Development Report 2002" was compiled in time for the 2002 UN SD conference in Johannesburg. In 2009 the NCSD was reformed and has since been comprised of non-governmental stakeholders and functioning as an independent body. NCSD was instrumental in the preparation of the NSDS by preparing analytical reports on different SD issues, providing a forum for stakeholder involvement and functioning as one of the mechanisms of horizontal integration (Estonian Ministry of Environment 2013c, ESDN 2013).

From 1997 to 2001 a preparatory cooperation project called "Estonia 21: Capacity Building for the Implementation of Agenda 21 in Estonia" was carried out in cooperation with the UNDP, Ministry of Environment and Stockholm Environmental Institute (SEI) as the project leader. The project made background research on SD practices; organized information events for different social groups from politicians to NGOs; mapped the long-term development possibilities, visions and goals for Estonia in preparation for creating the NSDS; and created instructions for setting up local agendas.

The NCSD supervised the development of the Estonian NSDS "Estonian National Strategy on Sustainable Development Sustainable Estonia 21" (SE21), approved by the Parliament in September 2005. The Estonian NSDS is a strategy for developing the Estonian state and society until the year 2030. It aims to highlight the requirements for success following the principles of SD and aiming for preservation of the traditional values of Estonia (SE21 2005: 4). The aim of the NSDS is to achieve simultaneous progress in viability of cultural space, growth of welfare, social coherence, and maintaining ecological balance.

The strategy was compiled under the coordination of the Estonian Ministry of the Environment in close cooperation with experts and stakeholders with Tallinn University acting as the leader of the consortium. The approval of the strategy was preceded by thorough public discussions. Since 2006 Estonian NSDS has been co-ordinated by the Strategy Bureau of the State Chancellery (Estonian Government Office 2013b). As the State Chancellery also coordinated the implementation of the Estonian Action Plan for Growth and Jobs 2005–2007, taking over the responsibility for coordinating the implementation of the NSDS increased the coherence between the goals and the monitoring efficiency. All related ministries and other institutions are responsible for implementing the sustainable development goals, and monitoring and reporting in their respective fields. Since 2011 the SEI section in Tallinn leads the Commission of Sustainable Development at the State Chancellery. Additional SD-related advisory bodies include the Estonian Environment Information Centre (EEIC), and Statistics Estonia.

Estonia has been actively participating in European and global SD partnerships since regaining its independence in 1992. On the regional level Estonia was one of initiators the cooperative sustainable development process Baltic Agenda 21 in 1996, aiming to implement cooperative projects to improve the living and working conditions of the inhabitants of the Baltic Sea area (Council of the Baltic Sea States 2013). At the 2002 UN SD Summit in Johannesburg the commitments for implementation of the Agenda 21 and Millennium Development Goals were renewed and the Estonian National Report on SD 2002 was presented (Estonian Ministry of Environment 2013d). Despite

renewed commitments, the local Agenda 21 initiatives did not become very popular in Estonia, and their activity had largely faded out by 2014. Estonia produced its first NSDS progress report at the EU level in 2007 (Estonian Ministry of Environment 2013e). As part of the Estonian preparation process for the 2012 Rio+20 conference, a review in the field of Green Economy was compiled (Estonian Ministry of Environment 2013f).

### 3.3.2.3. Environmentalism and the SD scene in Germany

**Environmentalism in Germany.** Nature protection has a long history in Germany. It has been argued that the roots of specific German environmentalism date back to German Romanticism with national identification with the *natural* as opposed to the *artificial* civilization (Goodbody 2002: 34). The history of centrally organized nature conservation goes back to 1906, when the State Agency for Natural Heritage Preservation, the first predecessor of the present Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, was established (Bundesamt für Naturschutz 2006). The next milestones include the establishment of the Reich Agency for Nature Conservation in 1935 and the Central Office for Nature Conservation in 1945 (known from 1949 as the Central Office for Nature Conservation and Landscape Management). In 1952, the Federal Institute for Nature Conservation and Landscape Management in Bonn was established. In 1962 it was reorganized to form the Federal Centre for Vegetation Ecology, Nature Conservation and Landscape Management. In 1975, it was renamed to Federal Research Centre for Nature Conservation and Landscape Ecology. In 1990, the integration of former German Democratic Republic institutions took place, and the International Nature Conservation Academy was established. Peter Bromley has argued that the division of Germany created different attitudes towards nature and nature protection, because pollution was significantly worse in East German industry (Bromley 1997: 185-198). Following the break-up of the former Eastern Bloc the concerns of the unified Germany in the early 1990s were predominately economic and social stability, leaving less room for environmental legislation. In 1993, the current German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation was established as German government's scientific authority with responsibility for national and international nature conservation, reporting to the German Ministry of Environment (BMU).

The German environmental movement has been quite decentralised. The modern movement began as an element of the countercultural fringe in the late 1960s and 1970s (Blue 2008). The Greens originated from new social movements from the protests of 1968, but also from the conservative spectrum. A strong driver of raising environmental awareness since the 1970s was also the civil resistance to nuclear power. The direct action-based Federal Association of Citizen Initiatives for the Protection of the Environment representing local environmental protest groups, founded in 1972, played a leading role in the anti-nuclear campaign. However, once many goals were achieved, it lost much of its previous importance (Paehlke 1995: 246).

The specifically German concerns like acid rain stripping German forests in the 1980s helped to raise the profile of environmental concern and movements in Germany higher than in many other countries (Blue 2008). Unlike in the United States, where most environmentalists stayed within traditional political parties or devoted their energies to pressure-group activity, German activists founded a new political party Die Grünen (The Greens) in 1979. The aim was to give political and parliamentary representation to the many environmental groups and peace activists in the country (European Greens 2014b). By 1983, the Greens were represented in the Bundestag with 27 seats. Many people who left the party shared similar values but did not identify with the used protest forms, such as civil disobedience which sometimes led to clashes with police at demonstrations. When the 1986 Chernobyl catastrophe in Ukraine resulted in radioactive contamination in parts of Germany, the

anti-nuclear movement pressured the conservative Chancellor Helmut Kohl to create a federal ministry for overseeing nuclear safety and the environment. The impact of the Chernobyl disaster raised awareness of the threats of air pollution. The Greens resisted compromise on the nuclear issue and increased their share of votes.

In the 1990 federal elections the Greens did not pass the required 5% limit, so in 1993 the Green Party joined forces with Alliance '90, a heterogeneous group of civil rights activists. The formed Bündnis 90/Die Grünen helped to boost their share of votes (German Green Party 2014). This was also supported by re-orientation towards a more moderate program in the 1990s and new focus on global warming and ozone depletion issues (European Greens 2014b). In 1998, the Greens entered the federal government for the first time. The red-green coalition government with the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) was renewed and lasted until 2005 (European Greens 2014b). The German Greens have continued being successful on both national and EU Parliament elections (German Green Party 2014). There was criticism in early 2000nds the Greens lost their political distinctness after becoming a governing party due to professionalization, personalization, and bureaucratization which widened the gap between the party and the ecology movement (Hoffmann 2002: 75-76).

It is often agreed that Germany enjoys a green reputation among its citizens and abroad (e.g. Soromenho-Marques 2002, Blue 2008, Uekötter 2014b). Environmentalists in other countries have applauded its strict environmental laws, phase-out of nuclear power and influential Green Party. As German industries found that they could thrive through environmental regulations, and develop export markets for green technologies, a broad consensus on the benefits of "going green" began to spread. Many Germans are proud of these achievements so it has been argued that environmentalism has become part of German national identity (Uekötter 2014b). However, there are also authors (e.g. Goodbody 2002, Uekötter 2014a) who argue that the environmental movement in Germany is in decline, resting on accomplishments of the 1980s.

**Sustainable development scene in Germany.** The German NSDS has been called a result of a long and winding path (Beuermann 2000; Jänicke et al., 2001). The Rio obligation from 1992 led the Federal Ministry for the Environment to prepare a policy paper "Steps towards sustainable, environmentally sound development", finalized in 1996. In 1997, the Federal Environment Agency published a report "Sustainable Germany" and the federal government adopted the report "Towards sustainable development in Germany" on the occasion of the special session of the UN General Assembly on Environment and Development in New York. By 1998, the Ministry of Environment prepared a draft programme "Sustainable development in Germany", which was never formally endorsed by the German cabinet. At the same time, the Parliamentary Enquete-Commission completed its report "Concept for sustainability: from model to implementation". It has been argued (Lafferty and Meadowcroft 2000, Tils 2007:164) that even though the German governments have considered themselves pioneers in environmental policy, the interrelations of environmental, economic and social implications of development became a major topic in politics only in 1998 when the new government with the Greens took it into its program as preparation for the UN 2002 Rio+10 summit.

In July 2000, the federal government restarted its efforts, deciding that a national SD strategy (NSDS) should be prepared. In December 2001 the government presented the first draft "Perspectives for Germany. Our Strategy for Sustainable Development". The publication was preceded by brief two-step dialogue phases with stakeholder meetings and citizens' internet consultations. The NSDS was launched at the UN Johannesburg summit in 2002. Implementation started with the formal cabinet decision in April 2002, followed by the first progress report in 2004. The self-imposed reporting was introduced to compel the government to examine its progress biannually. An initial consultation paper by the newly established Secretary of State Committee for Sustainable Development (Green Cabinet)

provided the basis for another dialogue phase in 2004. The document "Wegweiser Nachhaltigkeit 2005" served as a second, shorter progress report (originally foreseen for 2006, done earlier because of early Bundestag elections in 2005). It documented the current status of the NSDS as well as developments concerning new focal topics. The following progress reports were published in 2008 and 2012. The focus points of the 2008 Progress Report were climate and energy, sustainable management of raw materials, social opportunities posed by demographic change and food for the world. In the year of the Rio+20 conference in 2012, the Progress Report focused on themes with global relevance: green economy, climate and energy, and sustainable water resource policy. In addition, two peer-review processes took place in 2009 and 2013. 2012 was declared the Science Year of Sustainability by the German government under the banner "*Project EARTH: Our Future*". On the EU level, Germany has been vocally advocating for the renewal of the EU SDS. On the international level, Germany was actively involved in developing the SDG model to replace the MDG´s after 2015.

### 3.3.2.4. Environmentalism and the SD scene in Portugal

**Environmentalism in Portugal**. Portuguese environmentalism started to emerge relatively late in the 20th century, only after the II World War. Before 1948, when the Nature Protection League (Liga para a Protecção da Natureza) was created, there was no group activity related to nature in Portugal (Soromenho-Marques 2002: 107). The citizens began to become more active after the fall of the dictatorship in 1974 as the parliamentary democracy was built up (ibid: 104-109). However, several sources agree that even after the 1974 democratic revolution, the Portuguese focus has been geared towards raising the economic standard of living, as well as introducing and facilitating the relatively new democratic processes, leaving the environmental issues into the background (Bromley 1997, EEA 1999).

It has been estimated that the early 1980s were a turning point in the history of the Portuguese environmental movement with several NGOs and groups forming (Soromenho-Marques 2002: 109). This was the response to new ecological problems, such as the greenhouse effect, depletion of the ozone layer and lack of awareness of thereof in Portuguese society. The lack of an organized ecological movement to face these challenges motivated founding the first Portuguese green party *Os Verdes* in 1982 (Portuguese Green Party website 2014). Since its foundation, this green party had a close relationship with the Portuguese Communist Party and it has been argued that they have won parliamentary seats at national and European Parliament elections only by standing on lists sponsored by the Communist Party (Bomberg 2005: 183).

In addition to these developments in early 1980s, the European Environment Agency emphasises the relevance of joining the EU in 1986 for raising the profile of environmental matters in Portuguese politics:

> *"The environment was generally a low priority for Portugal before its accession to the European Union in 1986. Through the process of Portugal's application to join the EU, the environment started to gain in importance, mainly because of the requirements to translate EU Environment Directives and Regulations into national law"* (EEA 1999).

The OECD has also estimated that the accession to the EU played an important role in raising environmental awareness and providing financial help for tackling pressing issues:

> *"Portugal faces the challenge of achieving economic, environmental and social development that is nationally balanced and converges with that of other European countries. … For this purpose, Portugal has used and will continue to use EU funds to help it converge with other EU members in environmental protection. Significant investments were also made, and positive results achieved,*

*regarding nature conservation. Portugal has further made considerable efforts, which must be pursued, to integrate environmental concerns into the decision-making process.“* (OECD 2014)

Indeed, the most relevant Environmental Agreements have been adopted since 1988. Over the years laws were passed integrating the whole range of environmental directives from the EU into the national law. This, in turn, led to an increasing gap between what the laws were demanding and what the society was able to achieve and deliver (EEA 1999). In tune with the rising importance of environmental politics due to the rise of the SD agenda, Portugal increased its environmental expenditure in the second half of the 1990s (OECD 2014). The OECD and EEA both estimate that despite the progress so far, much remains to be done.

**The sustainable development scene in Portugal.** In tune with Peter Bromley´s comment from 1997 that the environmental agenda has only recently become important for Portugal (1997: 267), also the national SD planning started on that year. The Portuguese National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD) was established in 1997 as an advisory body to the government and parliament on all sustainable development issues, linked in administrative terms to the Ministry of Environment.

The Portuguese NSDS *“*Estratégia Nacional de Desenvolvimento Sustentável*”* was also adopted in 2007. The lead institution developing the strategy was the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Regional Development that also served as the case study partner for this study. The strategy-forming process was not participative, neither local nor regional authorities were directly involved in its development. With the new government in place in 2010, the main institutional responsibility in the coordination of the NSDS changed shifting from the Prime Minister Office to the Ministry of Environment. The NSDS was running from 2007 to 2015 aiming to fulfil the function of a long-term plan spanning across sectoral policies, guiding the development, reviewing and implementation of various plans and programs of existing and intended political action.

In 2007 also the bi-annual review process was introduced. The first and last review was submitted to the European Commission in July 2009. The second bi-annual report was planned to be finished by July 2011, but had not been published by early 2015. The development of SD indicators, which should be linked with the NSDS, making it possible to measure and assess its progress, was also on-going at that time. Considering the shift in focus in the light of Europe 2020 and Portugal 2020 strategies, the interest for developing them in the original from was also lost.

According to the last national assessment from September 2009, 118 municipalities (38%) declared having a LA21 process in place. There was no information, however, on how active these local agenda groups are.

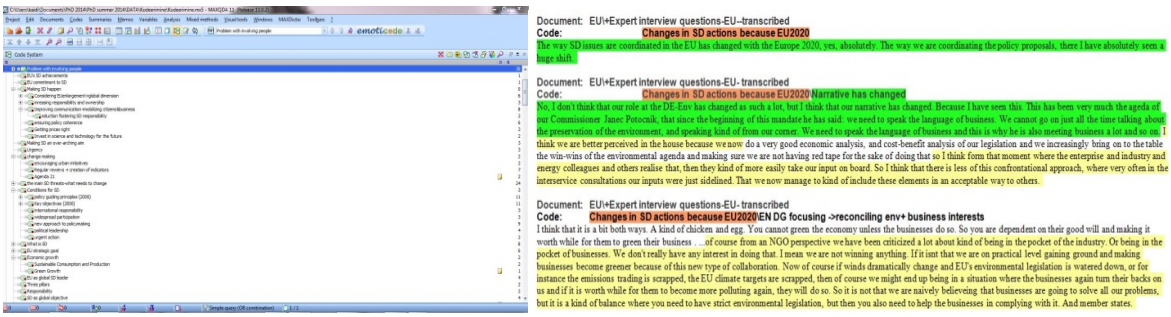
# CHAPTER 4
# CASE STUDY ANALYSIS: GOVERNANCE AND CIVIL SOCIETY APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPE

Chapter 3 ended with an analysis of the development of the SD scene of the case study participants. Building on this initial analysis, Chapter 4 continues with a detailed examination of the core aspects of research participant´s approaches to sustainable development. The aim of this chapter is to analyse and conceptualise the way the research participants make sense of sustainable development – which are in their opinion the main problems and challenges hindering sustainable development and which solutions they suggest and practice to solve these problems. To fulfil this task, this chapter focuses on primary data for analysing the SD-rhetoric and practices of each case.

The initial open coding of data from sixteen case studies produced nearly 1200 open codes. Next, the large code pool was densified by joining similar codes as sub-codes to categories. The categories were grouped in turn into related groupings, which offered new ways of seeing and understanding the phenomenon under study and supported the development of the theoretical framework.

The coding rounds helped to narrow down the amount of individual codes and reach concepts and themes explaining the central motivational and behavioural patterns of the actors. These core aspects are the result of intensive coding process which was carried out with the help of MaxQDA software over a longer period of repeating analysis and data collection rounds to be sure that all the relevant aspects were included. Figure 9 offers insights into the inner workings of using MaxQDA.

**Figure 9. Examples of open and selective coding of the EU case using MaxQDA software.**




Identifying core themes and categories and delimiting investigation around them is considered central for generating a grounded theory. The core themes and categories capture the essence the SD-related attitudes and activities of each case and join the cases into thematically linked clusters, serving as building blocks for the developing theory (for more details, see 2.2.3.).

The focus on the SD-related core themes and concepts representing the key problems and solutions according to each case meant that many interesting, but singular aspects of the individual cases were left out from this chapter. In many cases more specific individual details can be found in Chapter 3 in the section on development of the scene. The broad steps grounding this chapter are summarised on Figure 10.

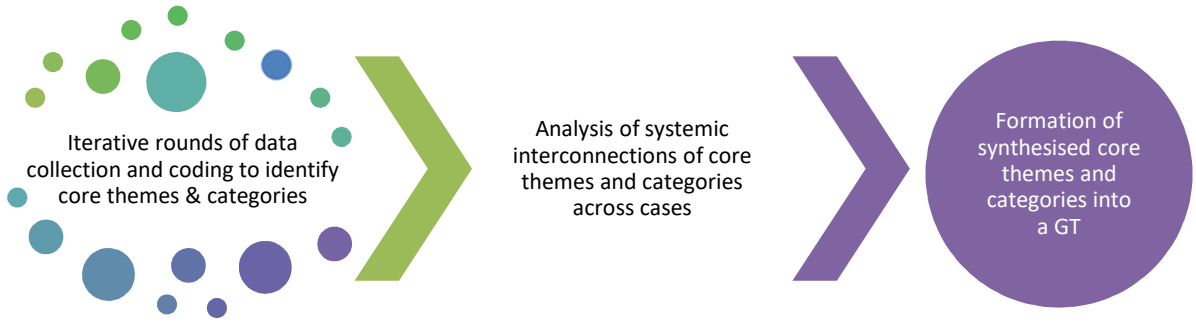



**Figure 10. Broad overview of the research steps grounding the case study analysis.**

The first level of theoretical saturation is attained when no new categories, properties or insights emerged from gathering and analysing primary data, resulting in reoccurring patterns and strong repetition of already observed themes. As clear patterns started to emerge, the categories and themes were integrated in a way that articulated a coherent understanding of the phenomenon of study, resulting in a small set of core themes and categories. Densely interconnected concepts can be read as narratives of current problems and needed solutions. In this way, each case represents a micronarrative of change. The analysis of individual case studies is followed by the synthesis of the approaches on the network/union level, which can already be seen as mesonarratives of change, summing up the SD-related experiences and views of the civil society and governance levels. The process of synthesis allows moving gradually from concrete statements and cases via grounded conceptual analysis of the situation towards a more abstract understanding of the processes.

Chapter 4 ends with preliminary results delimiting the further theory building process in Chapter 5 to a couple of core themes and categories guiding the further data inclusion and analysis. This is done with the last level of abstraction by synthesising the civil society and governance approaches to sustainable development from the individual case and network/union levels. The resulting core themes and categories along with their key properties can be read as macronarratives of change.

In terms of organisation, the civil society cases are introduced first, followed by the governance approaches. Individual case study accounts precede the accounts of bigger organisational units. After the individual cases are presented, each sub-group is analysed further based on the emerged core themes and concepts to find synthesised approaches. The chapter finishes with a short summary of the synthesised civil society and governance SD-approaches. The case studies follow a similar structural pattern: all start with an overview of the perceived core problems, followed by a discussion of the core theme and categories aiming to solve these problems and move towards SD.

Despite having a similar structure, the case study accounts differ to some extent in length and detail. The main reason for that is the case study groups are very diverse. Some cases have been active for decades, developing intricate philosophical and practical approaches, while others have been active for only a couple of years. There was also a clear difference in availability and nature of data on governance and civil society cases: the more formally oriented groups tend to routinely produce more written documents than the more action oriented initiatives, resulting in less available written data. In some cases only short webpage texts were available so the necessary information had to be gathered in interviews and fieldwork.

Following the GT research logic, the case study analysis is based mainly on primary data: written documents produced by the actors (e.g. sustainable development strategies) and supplemented

by interview data, which adds a more current view of the developments. Due to the different availability of material, the civil society cases tend to rely more heavily on information gathered via fieldwork, observation and interviews. However, there were also differences on the governance level: SD-related information was readily available in all cases except for Portugal, where even their national SD strategy was not translated to English. In Portuguese national case where the available primary data was very scarce, the analysis also included external sources.

So the following case study analysis continues the analysis which started in Chapter 3 and its results build the basis for theory building in Chapter 5. For the sake of bevity many abbrevations are used in this chapter including the civil society (CS) and governance (GOV) levels or the names of countries and networks (e.g. PT for Portugal, TN for Transition network). For a full list of abbreviations see page 3 and for more info on the interview partners, please turn to Appendix I.

# 4.1. Civil society case studies

The case study analysis of the nine civil society initiatives and their three overarching networks starts with outlining the problems perceived to be causing unsustainability and needing to be changed. Next, solutions for turning towards more sustainable development are outlined. The analysis of the networks follows individual case studies.

## 4.1.1. Ecovillage case studies

### 4.1.1.1. Lilleoru case study

**Problems.** The current development of the Western world is described as out of balance. This is considered the result of the externally focused and unreflexive nature of the current consumer culture. People are habitually living on an autopilot using much more than they actually need without considering the consequences of their choices, following blindly the values and norms of the consumer society:

> *"There is not enough reflection and awareness about which values I base my life and actions on, how much I need to use for living, how much simpler my life could be. The general way of thinking is narrow; also many people in power positions don´t think about the bigger picture or consider the consequences of their actions to other people and nature"* (AG, female, 30s).

The external focus on efficiency, gain and growth has resulted in serious problems like increasing inequality between people, overconsumption causing environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources.

The current educational system is considered inadequate and in need of reform as it does not help to develop a coherent understanding of the interconnected nature of processes that support or damage life. The ignorance in terms of inner processes and inner regulation skills on the individual level is deemed central:

> *"Many crises, also international, are caused by people not able to deal with their emotional and mental complexes. Many complexes are destructive, and there is a need to clean them up. People are missing the awareness to notice them and the ability to manage them, which should be taught as basic human skills to raise the quality of life"* (EG, female, 40s).

So, for Lilleoru members, the key problem leading to unsustainability is the automatic following of norms and values of the unreflexive and externally focused consumer culture. The resulting lacking awareness of the inner processes and their impact on outer processes is believed to cause

disconnection from oneself, others and nature, resulting in conflicts. The current educational system is considered inadequate to address these problems.

**Solutions for moving towards sustainable development: core theme and categories**

**Conscious awareness as the new paradigm** resulted from the constant coparative analysis as the core theme of the Lilleoru case explaining most actions and constituting the central solution for moving towards more sustainable way of life. Awareness in understood in this context as more than the regular dictionary definition of *"knowledge or perception of a situation or fact; concern about and well-informed interest in a particular situation or development"* (Oxford Living Dictionary 2014). In Lilleoru the attention is also turned inwards on the person and especially their ability to be aware, in line with the dictionary definition of self-awareness: "*Consider awareness as primary. Notice not only what you choose, but also what you are using for choosing – the attention itself is the key!*" (IG, male, 50s). So self-awareness as *"good knowledge and judgment about yourself"* (Cambridge Dictionary 2014).

In Lilleoru awareness is understood as a quality that all people have that enables them to recognise external objects and internal phenomena like thoughts, imaginations, emotions, bodily sensations. However, mostly people are not aware of their awareness so it is guided by automatic processes. Becoming increasingly aware of awareness in daily life is considered the key to a new way of living. This decreases the amount of automatic processes and increases the individual freedom of a person in choosing what they want to experience and focus on. As such it is considered the key to increasing personal sustainability as one is no longer subjected to automatic thoughts, emotions and habits and can choose what makes up their life much more freely. A life based on habitual patterns is described as a life based on the old paradigm, whereas a life based on conscious awareness is described as the new paradigm. It is argued that it is really hard, almost impossible to change a life that is ruled by subconscious processes and reactions without very strong external pressure. The shift to conscious awareness or the new paradigm is believed to accelerate change, so it was described as silent revolution taking place in the inner world of individuals. It starts on the individual level, but the impact spreads on to community level. The shift to a new paradigm is accompanied by focus shift from purely outwardly focused life to at least as much inwardly focused life which helps people to notice and accept their role and responsibility in processes and manage the inner processes to change unwanted reactions. So in this approach the central solution for living more sustainably is learning to become and stay aware of ones awareness.

It holds the key to individual change, which is, in turn, considered the precondition for communal, regional, national and even global change. Gradually increasing the use of awareness is considered the precondition for the paradigm change necessary for acknowledging and stopping the destructive and unsustainable developments causing the current multiple crises.

It is argued that mental and emotional prejudices and opinions are mostly disconnected from the current reality and misleading as such. Increased awareness helps to remove the learned helplessness, feeling overwhelmed and overpowered which hinders taking responsibility. The latter is considered a precondition for making necessary changes in a balanced, non-violent way. Developing the ability to stay aware of inner and outer processes is deemed the key to discerning between sustainable and unsustainable processes and making smart decisions.

**Primacy of inner individual change.** The community members and regulars participating in educational programs, such as The Art of Conscious Change or Kriya Yoga courses shared a deeper interest in inner transformation and were interested in learning more about their inner world. So, inner individual change is considered primary and starting with oneself the key to sustainability transition.

As every outer activity is based on inner decisions and impulses, the inner ecology is considered to have priority over outer ecology: *"Once the inner world is balanced and cleaned up, the person does ecologically sound decisions also towards the outer world"* (IG, male, 50s). Solutions in all other fields are believed to naturally follow inner transformation, es expressed in this quote used as a slogan of Lilleoru: *"Change yourself and the world around you changes"* (IG, male, 50s).

Thus, community members were convinced that internal change precedes external change. Trying to bring about change by making external changes while leaving internal structures intact was seen as a half-way solution. Attempts to change the world are considered very resource-intensive and much less effective than starting with oneself. So it was believed that inner changes lead to communal change, having a broader impact.

> *"This is the experience we have all made: it is impossible to change the others. The change begins with individuals and from there spreads to the wider circle of people and communities. It is very-very time intensive to try to change the systems. There are many examples of people trying to do it, in politics for example – it is essentially like fighting with windmills. I see that change takes place through smaller groups of people. Because in the end, also the corporate board members and government officials are all people"* (AG, female, 30s).

One interview partner suggested that many people are so set in their ways that they are not willing to look at things from a different perspective. So perhaps for such people natural disasters and severe personal crises are needed, forcing them to reconsider their habitual ways. Self-motivated action with awareness is suggested as an alternative to this forced change of perspective.

Sustainability was also seen as something that starts from the way the person relates to it and the outer world – nature and other living beings. Sustainable development was considered to start on the individual level by becoming aware of the inner processes causing unsustainable consequences and learning to change them. So the worldview dimension offers a key to understanding SD-approaches:

> *"I see that when people change their inner world, their way of thinking, the way of life through joining a community, it makes their health stronger and life more balanced and stable. Their way of life becomes simpler and more sensible. I see this slow change happening in people and this is the level where I´m active myself as well."* (AG, female, 30s).

Taking responsibility involves starting with oneself to increase (self)reflexivity and doing actions with awareness.

**Reflexivity** is understood as observing and witnessing the processes without rushing into action, noticing the way things develop and influence each other. It is suggested that it helpst to exit the habitual concentration on the outer world and leads to understanding the interconnectedness of life. Reflexivity and reconnecting is believed to lead to outer ecology – realising one's responsibility to live in a balanced and reasonable way, not taking more than needed and caring for the wellbeing of others and nature. Interview partners suggested that developing more sustainable ways of life involve not only the sparing handling of physical resources, but also of non-material resources like time, considering both short- and long-term consequences of actions, and being non-violent: *"The broader meaning of sustainability is to live in a way that does not harm. This is in a broader sense the way of life which allows the rest of the world to live as well"* (EG, female, 40s). So, from this perspective, reflexivity leads to respect for life. In Lilleoru, this also involves a sense of sacredness, which can be understood as awe for nature and phenomena with which humans co-exist and share the web of life with. Living rrspectfully involves a certain simplicity expressed for example in not using more than needed and preferring local materials. This approach is similar to many indigenous nations. "*My view is very close to indigenous peoples – being in balance with the surrounding nature and not using more than you need"* (AG, female, 30s).

Constant reflexive **action with awareness** is considered a silent revolution happening gradually through informal and formal education and change on the personal, interpersonal and communal levels. With its focus on the inner processes while working in the outer world, action with awareness is seen as a method for solving problems and conflicts and supporting gradual positive change. It is suggested that being sustainable begins with learning the reasons, causes and consequences of unsustainability and making conscious choices based on ethics and usefulness for the common good, not only oneself or a small group.

**A positive vision** of human development is also a prerequisite for moving towards a more sustainable way of life. This involves changing the understanding of the role of human being. The current vision is described as based on emotional and mental reactions and too little reflection and conscious choices. Human being is treated like a machine that can be repaired by experst – psychologists or psychiatrists – and the person themself has limited options for changing themselves. This view is characterised by disconnection from oneself, from each other, and from nature. It is suggested that people who are connected and aware of their own being are non-violent, in community with other people and nature and open to learning new ways of behaving and finding ways to fulfil their needs. So, a new and positive vision of human development includes a worldview of reconnecting: overcoming disconnection by reconnecting to self, other people and nature. Community members view themselves as positive change agents, showing that living in a new paradigm with more autonomy and inner freedom is possible.

Regarding ecological sustainability, living in a way that also considers the wellbeing of the surrounding world is considered essential, expressed in sparing use of rrsources. For example, preferring ecologically sound solutions and local, recycled and environmentally friendly materials and products and considering perpsculture principles. The products and food for the community are chosen carefully and when possible, bought from the neighbourhood. Water purification systems are ecologically sound, as well as heating systems in the new buildings. However, generally speaking, the technological innovations, such as the use of solar or wind energy, were a weak point at the time of research in comparison to ecovillages with an expressly ecological focus. The big building of The School of Conscious Awareness is being built largely with recycled materials and voluntary action. Many people who were not connected to the community beforehand found this joint building an access point, giving their manpower, tools, and materials to achieve the joint goal.

Reconnecting includes reconnecting to **community.** In comparison to other ecovillages, Lilleoru can be compared to communities based on a shared worldview and focus on human development, such as Findhorn in Scotland. Having a shared worldview is seen as one of the central keys for a viable community: *"These values, why people belong to this community, make up a similar worldview related to self-development and a simple way of life that is close to nature"* (TG, female, 40s). Lilleoru is a community of like-minded people where cooperation, respect and benevolence are highly valued, but it is also a school type of community because individual inner work and change-making are focused upon. A community of people who have learned to act with awareness in their daily lives as a powerful means for making an impact and bringing about a larger change is considered a relevant contribution for transitioning towards SD.

Locality is relevant, although the community has a network character involving a broader group of people than those living in Lilleoru. People are joined into a community by living together, by managing and developing the place, but also by acting based on shared principles.

**Cooperation** is understood as a type of action with awareness. It is believed that conscious ways of cooperating differs from cooperation based on emotional and mental habitual patterns as they are more to the point, have higher quality and bigger impact. It is believed that a group of people who

use action with awareness is capable of making a bigger contribution to SD transition: *"Once the individual is aware and is purifying him or herself from automatic habits, the whole community, and society benefits from that and becomes more aware and sustainable"* (EG, female, 40s).

In terms of external cooperation the open approach has proven successful. The extent of contacts and cooperation with the local government, businesses and other organisations has been on the rise since the early 2000nds. On the village, parish and county levels cooperation on development projects has been mutually beneficial resulting in the local municipality considering Lilleoru an innovative, useful and nature-friendly initiative:

> *"Also on the county level, Lilleoru has been the most active and exemplary NGO in the big Rae parish. And the biggest tourist attraction – the parish sends local as well as foreign guests to us. They appreciate that Lilleoru has put in so much work and effort to create such an open public space"* (EG, female, 40s).

International cooperation with GEN started in the early 2000nds. Lilleoru helped to start the Estonian ecovillage network in 2008 and has participated in its board ever since. Preparations were made for hosting the GEN-Europe conference "The wisdom of conscious communities" in 2018 in Lilleoru as as part of the 100th birthday celebrations of the Republic of Estonia, raising the impact of the community both nationally and internationally.

Whereas both Tamera and Sieben Linden had to deal with prejudices from local people and media about being a potentially dangerous sect and work hard on proving that they are harmless people with good intentions, Lilleoru has not had to deal with such situations on a similar scale. Intentional work for integrating into the local context was done since the beginning:

> *"We realised in the early years that we were a strange phenomenon in the middle of the Aruvalla village and started to consciously organise open doors days for villagers, inviting them from door to door to visit us, eat with us and socialise. This helped to lessen the barrier from the start. Also, the open doors days for people from all over Estonia have been taking place for years now. I think they have helped"* (AG, female, 30s).

Here the fact that Estonia is secular in comparison to Germany and especially Portugal has probably made the community more acceptable. Also, its focus on individual development is less intriguing than finding new ways for love and sexuality that has been seen as poroblematic in the case of Tamera.

Being part of the community is described as a growing and ripening process producing constant learning effects and gradual change. Conscious change happens without outer pressure or coercion, making non-violence and benevolence relevant qualities to develop in order to achieve smooth changes. Community members support each other in moments where resistance to change surfaces and conflict breaks loose, blocking openness and cooperation. Community skills also involve having methods for solving conflicts. Practicing such methods is considered helpful for solving arising misunderstandings and tensions with respect. Instead of blaming others such methods enable reflecting upon, and if needed, changing the reactions. Practicing the principles of non-violence, benevolence, avoiding criticism, being open, helpful and aware when communicating with others, also contributes to social sustainability: *"We have developed a way of cooperating that does not criticise, but inspires and brings forward. Practicing this daily is how our community works"* (TG, female, 30s). The knowledge of conscious action for solving conflicts is shared with others in regular The Art of Conscious Change courses in Estonia and aboad as a contribution to a wider SD transition.

**Educational reform** is the third core category encompassing acquiring new skills for individual change, grasping interconnections and openness for lifelong learning and alternative sources of knolwedge.

In Lilleoru education is the primary outreach tool used to foster change and raise awareness of the relevance of inner individual change. As a place of learning, it offers various options for different levels of experience ranging from The Art of Conscious Change courses helping beginners in orientating in their inner processes and improving their life quality to Babaji´s Kriya Yoga for advanced students of inner research. In addition to events and courses, publishing related books is part of the educational activities. Although the main focus is on adult education, a new school for children using the conscious change methods was being prepared at the time of research.

Acquiring new skills for individual change involves learning to observe and accept one´s reactions as well as learning techniques for letting go of unwanted emotions and thoughts. Community members engage in lifelong learning either as teachers or as students to ensure an open attitude for change. Openness for lifelong learning means having an investigative attitude and not settling with "*that is the way things are*". The change-making strategy for moving towards SD used in Lilleoru can be described as a gradual process of bringing conscious awareness into all actions and helping to purify oneself from automatic subconscious habit and thought patterns. Rather than campaigning for their methods, these are shared in case people show interest or join educational courses:

> *"I cannot say that our knowledge here should be for everybody. This is not the way it works. We need to consider the plurality, the differences, and inner wishes, needs, and motivations of the people, the ways they seek happiness. When somebody feels that this knowledge which we practice touches them, they come and ask, and we share it. I see this as the right way"*(EG, female, 40s).

Education is not understood as a way of conveying ready-made formulas and solutions from teachers to students, but more as a way of supporting the investigative nature of each individual regardless of their age and prior knowledge base. Although there are various courses including e.g. ecological building or medicinal herbs, the starting point and focus is on learning to recognise and manage the inner structures and processes:

> *"It is simple practical knowledge … It describes the essence of being human, explains the invisible parts inside of us very well, and the stable part which is not thoughts and emotions and physical sensations. Many people are seeking for it, but they don't have an experience of inner clarity and recognition of that stable, calm and still essence. This experience really changes the values and worldview"* (AG, female, 30s).

So, having respect for alternative, experiential and intuitive ways of knowledge is considered relevant. Since the early formation of Lilleoru, yogic knowledge has played a central part. It is suggested that through acquiring new skills, knowledge and experiences, changes take place within individuals and gradually also in the community and society.

The solutions of the Lilleoru case for a more sustainable development are captured into the core theme and categories along with key porperties, listed in the table below.

**Table 12. Overview of the core theme and categories of Lilleoru case study.**

| **Conscious awareness as the new paradigm** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Primacy of inner change** | **A positive vision** | **Educational reform** |
| Taking responsibility | Reconnection | Acquiring new basic skills |
| Becoming (self)reflexive | Respect for life | Grasping interconnections |
| Increasing inner freedom | Sparing use of resources | Openness for lifelong learning |
| Action with awareness | Community and cooperation | Acceptance of alternative knowledge |

Conscious awareness as the new paradigm is the core theme and the core solution with primacy of inner change, a positive vision and educational reform as main ways to support it.

### 4.1.1.2. Sieben Linden case study

**Problems.** The currently destructive, wasteful Western and individualistic consumer society is considered unsustainable. The norm of having more and new things which are produced in far-away places to feel good is described as a societal sickness that needs to be healed. Destruction and crisis in different areas of life are considered the result of this sickness. The role of ecovillagers is considered difficult as the movement cannot heal as much as is being destroyed. This can cause feeling overpowered, desperate, frustrated and helpless.

The siebenlindeners were quite critical about life in Germany, agreeing that the ecological movement in Germany is relatively big, but pointing out that the gap between ideas and actions – the head-heart gap (German: *Kopf-Herz Spaltung*) – is also wide. They estimated that there were about 20 000 responsible people doing their best to bridge this gap, but two million would be needed to create a critical mass and make a significant difference. The pace of change is considered slow and initiative for change low: *"In Germany, things change slowly, very slowly. The mentality prevails that if you don´t start, neither will we, but if you take the responsibility, then we will do it as well"* (SS, female, 20s). Community members have experienced that it is often easier to influence faraway people, for example in the third world, than Germans, as *"people here don´t get it,"* (ES, female, 40s), which has led to some frustration. The passivity of Western people in changing their way of life is considered a big problem.

**Solutions for sustainable development: core theme and categories**

Simpler responsible life emerged as the core theme and central solution of the Sieben Linden case. It implies that the current systems are considered too complex, so people have lost personal connection to it. Instead of feeling angry, overwhelmed or paralysed about the system that is perceived as problematic, even "sick", the community members have decided to contribute to SD transition on the local level by taking responsibility for living in a simpler, ecologically sound and socially fulfilling way and sharing their experiences and knowledge to everybody interested. Instead of waiting for others to initiate and carry out change, taking responsibility for change by simplifying one´s own way of life and doing it together as a community is the path towards SD used in and suggested by Sieben Linden. It also involves downscaling the way of life by using ecologically responsible solutions, living in a community and educating visitors on alternative ways of living is done for individual and collective wellbeing.

**Downscaling** the current global systems is understood as a means for taking ecological responsibility and healing the harm that has been done by relocalising, recycling and sharing, consuming seasonally, regionally and generally less. This was seen as a way for overcoming the passive, wasteful and destructive attitudes of the consumer society and starting the healing process on the individual and communal levels. Members of the ecovillage intentionally stepped out of the consumer society to live in better coherence with what they considered right. A simpler life in an ecovillage was experienced as more authentic and more satisfying. Degrowth ethos opposing to the mainstream idea that wellbeing comes through growth, informs the simpler life design of Sieben Linden. It involved for example eating primarily local and seasonal fruits and vegetables (fresh and canned) to avoid contributing to wasteful global transport and loops. Various sharing practices are widely used, for example experiences with shared spaces like the community kitchen or community services such as car sharing. Also using and sharing ecologically sound technological solutions contributed to downscaling. Sharing helps to avoid excess consumption and makes it possible to minimise waste and pollution, helping to living simpler, responsible lives. Sieben Linden considers itself as a largely waste-free ecovillage governed by the principle that every item of waste is a resource

in the wrong place. After having experienced the consumer lifestyle and discovered that it does not make them happy, community members had intentionally chosen to consume less without regrets. It was argued that poverty is not having less, but the feeling of not having enough or not having a choice. In the ecovillage setting downscaling and sharing have a different flavour – It does not mean being poor, for the inhabitants it means helping each other and the nature by sparing energy and resources. While many friends and relatives of ecovillagers thought that they were sacrificing a lot by limiting their opportunities and depriving themselves of comforts and personal freedom, the ecovillagers themselves experienced a sense of satisfaction from walking their talk. Indeed, some ecovillagers described their simplified and downscaled way of life as eco-luxury lifestyle:

> *"I feel in luxury, I have really high-quality food here, warm atmosphere, people, and the shared rooms and I can really spread my ideas. I just say I want to offer dancing, I rent a room and its OK, it's really easy here"* (SS, female, 20s).

However, the peer pressure for downscaling also had a downside. To avoid causing pollution and contributing to climate change flying was not considered good practice in the ecovillage, causing problems for those, who wanted to e.g. cooperate in development projects in the third world:

> *"We don´t have the normal situation of a city life where you simply fly to New York if you want to, without any consideration of what it will cost to the world. With us, you have to consider that if you want to fly to Ghana to support a project there, then the other people might consider it a stupid idea. Here you need to control your motivation on a regular basis"* (CS, female, 50s).

Indeed, some weeks after my fieldwork in Sieben Linden, I was on my way to fieldwork in Estonia, when I met an ecovillager in the airport, heading to Africa without the others knowing. So peer-pressure does not always bear the fruit of giving up unacceptable practices, sometimes it also makes people keep quiet about them.

Further key aspects are **taking ecological responsibility** and **healing**. Destruction in different areas of life is considered the result of societal sickness caused by the destructive, polluting and wasteful consumer society. This causes frustration, being overwhelmed and helpless. Overcoming these emotions over and over again to take responsibility and continue making a difference requires courage and resilience: *"The world is so out of balance, that we get the feeling that all the efforts are in vain. We have to decide again and again that it makes sense, taking the responsibility"* (CS, female, 50s). The community has been restoring the land, called Mother Earth by the locals, plundered by drilling gas from 300-meter deep gas holes. This situation is interpreted as a metaphor for the violent treatment of women by men in search of fast gratification. Sparing use of resources and living close to nature to contribute to healing of nature are relevant for siebenlindeners. They are proud that their energy consumption is ca. one fourth of German average and $CO^2$ use is one-third of the average, achieved through as closed energy and material circles as possible, use of solar energy, well-isolated buildings and building with natural, regionally available raw materials like straw, clay and wood, organic gardening for maximum self-sufficiency, vegan and vegetarian nutrition, and in terms of transport, car-sharing and avoidance of flying. Like in Lilleoru, each new building is a research space for developing the building techniques and disseminatinhg the accumulated knolwede in workshops.

Ecological sustainability matters and dilemmas were present in the daily choices and discussions of the community members:

> *"We also talk about what candles we use – is palm oil ecological or stearin. Is it more ecological to use recycled paper towels for the guests or wash towels. We have some commitments for products we always use – hemp and clay for building, for example"* (CS, female, 50s).

The members valued being a good example of a sustainable settlement and having a small ecological footprint.

**Recreating community** was seen as a relevant support for systems change towards simpler, more responsible way of life. It involves openness for reconnecting to each other and surrounding nature to overcome individualism, building capacity of being reflective in order to be able to solve conflicts and foster cooperation. The ecovillage started with a strong ecological focus, but over the years in practice it became clear that social factors are crucial for the continuation of the project and require even more work and effort. The communal lifestyle is seen as one of the main keys to sustainable human development. Communal decision-making and more autonomy on the local level are further keys to better social coherence and cooperation. Over the years the ecological principles have become more mainstreamed in Germany and the difference between the way of life in the ecovillage and a regular village has lessened. However, certain differences have remained:

> *"The materials we use, the solar energy and transport measures like public transport or car sharing, knowing that our children receive ecological and social knowledge, experiences and education. Organic farming, DIY-approach, trying to reduce $CO_2$. Mutual solidarity, exchange, respect and support, personal and communal growth, we can remind each other what is not ecological, if needed." (ES, female, 50s).*

Similarly to Tamera and Lilleoru, the presence of the ecovillage has rendered numerous benefits to the region. The presence of the ecovillage has brought over 150 new people to the Altmark region, where the current trend is leaving the countryside for cities (*Landflucht*). Two schools (Freischule Debekok and Yes in Salzwedel) have been started in the area thanks to people related to this community, which has encouraged also people not related to the community to move to the region. The local businesses are also giving their share of jobs and income. Thus they have been contributing to the economic, social and cultural viability of the area while polularising ecologically sound ways of life.

**Openness** is expressed in the attitude open for learning, as they are continuously searching for better ways of communicating and organising themselves. As people have changed over the years, so have the values and practices and the direction of the whole ecovillage. Being open helped them also through the difficult times in the beginning when settling down in Poppau raised fears among the locals. Today many locals are visiting Sieben Linden regularly, for example their store, the bar or the dance evenings. Contact is also kept up with a yearly traditional volleyball match, followed by a celebration with a cake. Being open to criticism is considered a proof that change is possible. Tolerance towards other perspectives is also part of their openness, expressed in the attitude that instead of preaching or judging, being a living example of an alternative is the best strategy. For dealing with conflict and interpersonal problems the Forum method, as well as practices of sharing, reflecting, hearing out and accepting are used: *"...it's rather sharing what was felt, creating sympathy and the other can use this sympathy instead of self-righteousness, then all is possible"* (US, female, 40s). As their goal is being a living example of a sounder alternative, being open to visitors is of central importance. However, with the constant flow of interested newcomers and seminar participants, finding the balance between openness and privacy has become a struggle for many inhabitants. One of the solutions is to invite people only in certain times and asking them to stay on certain paths to provide privacy for the locals.

Overcoming individualism is part of living in a community. The shared core values include not lying, killing or harming or using more than needed, saving and recycling resources to live ecologically soundly, and respecting each other and nature regardless of how important or inconsequential they seem to us. The shared commitment of serving life and thinking beyond personal needs and wishes is considered especially relevant:

> *"Our commitment is to serve life. Through eating, communicating, respecting. This also means that it's not mainly about me, but that we need to consider the big picture and contribute so that the*

*bigger whole could blossom. This is the commitment that everybody here follows"* (CS, female, 50s).

Dealing with the inner dimensions is considered relevant to remain healthy, but a shared spiritual discipline or authority is avoided, largely due to historical reasons:

*"It is relevant that people take care of their energy source so that they could function well. There is no guru, teacher, it is a conscious choice and has to do with German history. Alternative political people are afraid of a Führer and all the more a religious Führer. We have done workshops with Thomas Hübl or Joanna Macy... but we don't have a shared spiritual direction"* (CS, female, 50s).

At the core, all religions and morals are considered to meet in the basic ethical values of not killing, lying, etc. All the interviewed inhabitants argued the community members follow their inner guidance or inner child, or believe in a godly order.

Cooperation is essential for living in a community. This entails finding solutions that one can stand for instead of opposing to something, which was experienced as tiring. Many people joined the community because they wanted to stand for something positive. So indifference towards the surrounding world is not tolerated. Instead, cooperation and participation is expected, be it in some political project (e.g. against nuclear waste) or voluntary work for the common good (e.g. in the local Transition group). In cooperation with national and the EU structures Sieben Linen welcomes young volunteers in the framework of the national voluntary ecological year and the European Voluntary Service programs. On the political front, some community members work as representatives in the parish council (*Gemeinderat*) and county administration (*Landrat*). They have been invited to participate in higher levels as representatives of the greens, but have declined, because it is not seen to bring the needed results.

**Reflexivity** and introspection are further key aspects of living in a community. The experience is that a community functions as a mirror, pushing for more reflexivity, which is not always easy to bear. The problem is that people tend to hope that by joining a community their social troubles will be over, but instead, it brings out their weaknesses which require intense inner work to deal with:

*"It's the experience of many that they want paradise, but when people move here, they are confronted primarily with problems. Many people leave then. In the city it is less perceptible, there are more distractions. People don't concern themselves with what they feel. For example, workaholics use the TV as a distraction. Here the pace of life is slower, and you cannot avoid coming into contact with whatever you are experiencing. People are mostly so busy all the time, that they never arrive at here and now and so they are not responsible"* (CS, female, 50s).

Life in a community means that people have to face themselves and the other people more intensely than in usual settings. The positive effect is that this inspires people to be more intentional in their lives and practices. The communal way of life was described as a constant polishing off of sharp edges, or being in a test-tube in a laboratory where there is nowhere to hide. In this sense living in a community is a constant learning and adaption process, and requires openness, the ability to take responsibility for one´s actions, revise pre-existing ideas and habits and make changes.

**Education** is the third main field of activity for moving towards more sustainable development. To facilitate the spread of simpler way of life and share what has been learned along the way, educational programs are offered to help to open new perspectives and enabling people to learn new skills. Education and teaching mainly take place by example, as the siebenlindeners prefered to see themselves as guides, not teachers. The community members were mainly waiting for people to come to them for educational programs and for experiencing the ecovillage lifestyle. Sieben Linden was one of the hubs for developing the GEN educational program Gaia Education. They were also an official

partner for the UN initiative World Decade of Education for Sustainable Development running between 2005 and 2014 with the goal to establish sustainable development as a model in all aspects of education. As opposition is considered unproductive, they aim to draw attention to better solutions without preaching: *"It is more relevant to include our neighbours than being upset about them because they are ecologically unreasonable. This only creates separation. If we start from the social level, the inclusion becomes easier"* (CS, female, 50s).

Awareness raising about the interconnectedness of people and nature belongs to the main goals of their take on education, as does reskilling. Reskilling involves reconnecting to each other to learn cooperation or reconnecting to the land to learn how to grow food and care for the plants and animals, as well as learning how to cook or do other necessary practical things often forgotten by contemporary city-dwellers.

Education is considered the means for bringing about gradual change, one heart at the time, setting the pace for the transition. The one heart at the time change-making approach is considered slow, but sure. Visitors often described their experience as inspiring and supportive for making changes in their personal lives. Thus, the change is seen to happen locally, one heart at the time, as a result of formal or informal and formal learning rather on a grassroots level rather than as a result of general governmental regulations.

The core theme along with core categories and key properties opening the Sieben Linden solution for a more sustainable way of life is summed up in the following table.

**Table 13. Overview of the core theme and categories of the Sieben Linden case.**

| **Simpler responsible life** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Downscaling** | **Recreating community** | **Education** |
| Ecological responsibility | Reconnecting | Awareness raising |
| (Re)localisation | Cooperation | Individual change |
| Sharing and recycling | Openness | Reskilling |
| Healing | Reflexivity/inner work | |

The central solution of the Sieben Linden approach is adopting a simpler and more responsible way of life with downscaling, recreating community and education as central ways to support the goal.

### 4.1.1.3. Tamera case study

**Problems.** The violent Western liberal capitalist system is considered the main problem. Spending huge reseources on military developments, it is described as based on fear, competition, suppression, and mistrust. This system, where being strong and powerful is the way to feel secure and accepted, is also described as war-civilization. As such, it is belived to lead inherently to conflicts, brutality and perpetual crisis. The root cause of conflicts and violence is believed to be the patriarchal dominance grounded in mistrust between the genders. This is supported by missing skills for dealing with unrequited love without turning to conflict and violence.

Also the lack of connection with oneself, nature and other people emerged as a central concern, resulting in lack of peaceful and honest human relationships that could create a basis for peaceful and sustainable societies. Disconnection also leads to following blindly what the society dictates, leading to loss of identity: *"And this is actually all over society that you lose yourself, your identity, and you start to be a collective being like a 'beautiful woman' or a 'successful man' and you play the role. You have to get rid of all the roles to be a human being again"* (MR, female, 50s). So playing social roles without reflection, resulting in false identity, is considered another key problem.

Furthermore, the collision between the socio- and biosphere is perceived as a cultural crisis (Duhm 2011: 15). The lack of a positive and inspiring vision and need for a new culture for the future were considered among the central problems. The development of humankind is seen to be entering a dead-end, one that cannot be overcome by traditional means. The work of the UN and the NGO-groups like GEN itself along with innumerable further peace projects is regarded important and indispensable, but insufficient. It is argued that they are missing a positive aim with global proportions, a convincing perspective for a violence-free co-habitation of our planet's inhabitants. The people in Tamera were critical not only of the governments' violent politics but also of the slow, gradual "one heart at a time" approach to change used by many ecovillages and GEN itself. They considered it insufficient and argued that too many people on the alternative scene were content with having a small vision of justice and ecological balance and doing small deeds, like growing their own tomatoes, which is not deemed sufficient to address the urgent situation.

**Solutions for moving towards sustainable development: core theme and categories**

To solve the current problems, establishing a **new peace culture** is considered necessary. The people of Tamera see it as their responsibility to work towards establishing such a new culture of peaceful coexistence. For achieving SD a new culture – peace culture is seen necessary:

> *"A new cultural concept arises from a new way of seeing things. This new way of seeing is the result of new basic experiences. The urgent task for the alternative movement is to establish inner focal pillars and centres where such basic experiences for a new culture can take place"* (Duhm 2011: 14).

Thus the process for attaining SD consists of replacing the matrix of fear and violence, as the current system is called in Tamera, with the matrix of life by adopting a positive vision, reconnecting with self, other people and nature, healing from the pain by taking responsibility and adopting a non-violent investigative attitude to create an innovative model called a healing biotope resulting in peaceful and creative planetary sustainable development.

**A meaningful and positive vision.** It was also believed that part of the current problem is that the current development vision is not meaningful and fulfilling. It was stressed that people need a meaningful vision to channel their energy into. Education and lifelong learning help to shape the needed value change and turn towards meaningfulness. If half of the young people who go to the army after school were instead going into education for peace, visiting crisis areas, seeing the situation of the world, helping out and directly putting their power into something useful, this would make a big difference. People in Tamera see that humans are too stuck in the old ways and even if they are looking for solutions, these are too small-scale. So they see it as their responsibility to develop a bigger positive and inspiring vision. Their vision is to construct centres where violence-free co-habitation of humans with other creatures can be developed in an exemplary manner. The community members see it as their role as peace-workers to co-develop this positive vision to facilitate the ascent of peace culture. The community members already see themselves as part of this vision as they need to live it in order to help to fulfil it:

> *"I can say that I live in the vision. I can see the reality as it is now and I can see the vision; this gives me the hope and inspiration. So I have a goal that this vision shall be here on Earth – I want that no animal is harmed, I want people to live, and I want to have communication on this planet. I want to have freedom on this planet and to feel that love can grow – with all that injustice now it cannot. So this is how we live"* (MR, female, 50s).

The Healing Biotopes Project was started with Tamera as the first healing biotope as a hub of violence-free co-habitation. Their work, which they call peace work, includes reconnecting with other

people and nature in community of life to heal and build trust, but also adopt a research attitude to develop a model of a new way of living that would make the violence-based system obsolete.

> *"Healing from the violence and providing new models for energy, for water, for nutrition, for love, for living together with each other, with nature, and with God. The necessary human know-how is gathered through questioning the conventional truths and discovering the real connections through self-study, engagement with art as a research tool, interpersonal and group work"* (BR, male, 40s).

Tamerians consider it their responsibility to develop through individual and community research a model containing new peaceful information about new ways of loving, producing food and energy and cooperating with each other and nature. Developing this model has taken decades, but it is believed that once it is ready, it will help to transform the entire humanity in a much faster pace. According to their perspective it is not the size of the project that decides its success, but the strength and truthfulness of its vision and the completeness of its model character paving the way towards evolution.

It is believed that this new way of life cannot be realised in capitalism as it is based on violence, fear and competition, not cooperation and peace. Instead, a **non-violent systems change** is deemed necessary. This new model is believed to work by replacing the matrix of fear and violence with what is called the sacred matrix which supports life. The necessary transformation process is described as a peaceful instead of a violent revolution by developing alternative lifestyles and institutions that foster basic needs for contact, meaningful work and a reduction in conflicts and fear. Non-violent individuals and communities are seen as nuclear parts of a sustainable way of life, fostering truth and trust. Thus, establishing a new peace culture is seen as the way towards a more sustainably developing society. The new peace culture model cannot just take over the old organisational and thought structures. It is believed that the new structures need to be discovered and tested to pave the way to a future without war. It is suggested that in order to succeed, the peace movement has to become much more strategic and the level of consciousness has to rise globally, because *"..as long as we believe we can fight the bad we won't find the solution because the structure is still the same"* (KR, male, 40s). It is considered necessary to look deeper into the structures causing conflict and war by doing one´s own research to find ways of breaking out from the circle of violence. Finding new structures of self-organisation is considered crucial for developing organisational structures that lead to creativity instead of bureaucracy.

**The holistic worldview** supports understanding that once the new model with non-violent practices on cultural, economic, ecological and social fields of life is finished, it will instantly affect the global shared human information filed as a global acupuncture point for peace: *"The current civilisations follows the morphogenetic field of war. We can only end the suffering by stepping out of this field and building a new one: a morphogenetic field of peace"*(LR, female, 50s). This unorthodox idea of transformation informing the idea of healing biotopes stems from the morphogenetic fields theory suggested by the botanist Rupert Sheldrake in late 1980s. Sheldrake suggested that all natural systems from insulin molecules to pigeons and orchid plants inherit a collective memory from all previous beings/things of their kind, however far away or long ago they existed, meaning that also people can access the conspecific collective memory (Shermer 2005). Such healing biotopes are compared to healing global acupuncture points, creating a global paradigm-shift towards peace (Lichtenfels 2012).

Belief in the effect of the morphogenetic field in multiplying the effect of the new peace model corresponds to the holistic belief of what is inside is also on the outside and vice versa. They consider the balance between inner and outer change necessary for successful sustainability transition.

**Community** emerged as the second core category of the Tamerian SD model. Social sustainability issues were in the spotlight as the core issues causing violence, which in turn cause unsustainability. The community is considered a structure that leaves room for creativity and can function without violence. The logic of life and healing are considered to be communitarian, cooperative and holistic in nature, needing trust and truth:

> *"A realistic peace strategy needs to come from communitarian intelligence. Everything in the world exists as a community. Even our body is a great community, a model for cooperation that can only function if each part of the body knows its place. A large part of research needs to concentrate on how to build up a community, how does each human being find their place in the whole? We need to find new ways of revealing our intelligence. For that we need deep trust. Trust is created through truth. Normally we meet each other with masks …, we always circle around our personal problems or try to pretend to be different from what we are. If it is possible to create a space where human beings don't have to pretend something, but where we can become true again then a lot of our energy will be released for a global and common vision"* (LF, female, 60s).

So, for creating peaceful and sustainable communities and societies the tamerians see the need to enable peaceful, trusting and honest human relationships. It is considered essential for the success of the new culture that each individual reconnect to the community, finding their place and acting as a self-responsible part of it. The holistic worldview grounds their belief that each person carries both personal as well as collective responsibility for the humankind because the life situations we face as humans are archetypal. The human problems are often seen as patterns with historical roots and require not only personal therapy but also societal and political action. Tamerians aim to create new, peaceful archetypes to break the violent habits and create a new reality. Participants of the healing biotope project in Tamera feel that they carry personal responsibility for the entire human race, which is a heavy burden, captured in the sentence: "*Be the change you want to see in the world*".

It is believed that the possibility of healing exists in every moment. The environmental crisis and the inner crisis are seen as two sides of one coin and solutions can be found only when the two are considered together. **Reconnecting** with nature and each other belong to Tamera's core ideas next to the understanding that both individual and societal change must happen together – otherwise, it will not be lasting or deep enough for significant results. Community is seen as the setting which enables reconnecting, healing and regaining trust, which paves the way to having the courage to take responsibility and learn to live in a way where love and sexual relationships are not based on social norms and fears, but on conscious choice of the partners.

**Healing** was considered the first step leading to a new (or a rediscovered old) culture of peace, cooperation and community. It is suggested that to change, humanity needs to be cured of the inherited patterns of fear and violence. For that increased levels of honesty, openness and transparency in interpersonal relationships are needed. It is suggested that healing can take place through caring for the common good and appreciating grace and God, the holy matrix. In fact, it is the holy matrix that is considered to have the power to heal – an invisible sacred presence behind everything, always accessible through direct experience. In this sense, healing is a spiritual process, connected with sacredness. Healing also means individual inner work, as people need to realise the changes they want to see in the world in themselves first. Healing is considered a precondition of reconciliation and reconnection and as such a precondition for establishing the peace culture and moving towards sustainable ways of life.

Love and sexuality were the fields where healing and recreating trust were considered most needed. They are counted among the strongest self-healing powers, which need to be freed from the current prohibitions and suppression causing and multiplying the patterns of violence. It is claimed

that trust has been lost in the matrix of violence, so it needs to be restored between people and with nature. Tamera describes itself as a greenhouse of trust, aiming to recreate trust to enable people to open up. Creating living environments which would enable trust between people and nature is considered essential to foster positive changes. To achieve this, the relationships have to become non-patriarchal, the love relationships free of jealousy, and the competition-driven capitalism needs to be replaced by a peaceful and trusting system. To facilitate change, Tamera created a Global Love School where love is a research subject, and the question is how to create new peaceful love structures. Ceasing fighting is an important step towards establishing peace, as it is believed that "*truth in love is a revolution*", leading the way towars sustainable human civilization.

Conflict resolution skills are needed to be part of positive changes. It is argued that as long as we are not able to solve our conflicts in a community, we will not be able to find solutions on a political level. Creating peace models means to understand the structures of conflict and find solutions for them. It is suggested that each conflict can serve as a step towards an insight if people wish to learn.

**Research attitude** is the third core category of the Tamera case study consisting of openness to experiment, reflexivity, education and awareness raising. To develop a new peace culture and establish a development that can truly be called sustainable, the members of Tamera have adopted an investigative attitude, second guessing all the learned assumptions, the conventional way of thinking and doing things and experimenting daily to find more suitable solutions and practices to the urgent social and ecological problems. This makes is possible to gather new practical experiences and knowledge and find new answers based on personal and communal experiences. Furthermore, the new model needs new structures and finding them needs inner and outer research:

> *"In every war, the structures are more or less the same, and we must have the courage to see that and to study the structures, also within ourselves, to create solutions. So the research is focussed on how we can break the structural cycle of violence and create trust among humans?"* (LR, female, 50s).

Speaking of the "research attitude" has to do with the fact that many people shaping this agenda had academic backgrounds. It is used to signify an investigative approach characterised by openness to experimenting and second guessing social and cultural truths. It is suggested that research attitude helps to find new, more sustainable, fulfilling and stable ways of living together. It is argued that the truth has to be practically discovered. Indeed, while developing the theory of planetary healing grounding the vision of peace culture, many traditions, communities, philosophies and religions were studied and synthesised, but the descision was made to use new concepts only.

**Self-study** is part of the research attitude and the key to societal sustainability was considered to lay in humanistic research. Inner work was seen as a precondition for creating new structures:

> *"Until the human beings change their inner structures we will always continue to reproduce the same outer structures that are based on war, exploitation, etc... this is the idea of Tamera, to create models, where peace becomes a lived experience. And how can we consciously build structures – social, ecological, and technological – that allow trust to evolve"* (MR, female, 50s).

It is believed that education needs to focus more on introducing non-violence in relationships, which is seldom learned at present-day schools. The education systems in Tamera are aimed at preparing people for non-violent ways of conflict resolution. The children have their own school, and for the adults, different educational options are available from awareness raising for visitors to more intensive approach for the community members. Since 2005 the community started to build a worldwide network of peace workers, developing the Global Campus educational courses. In this framework, the skills considered essential for building this new sustainable peace culture include courses on art and

healing, the sacred matrix and holographic worldview, ecology, and the theory of global healing. Networking with peace activists in different conflict areas around the world has increased their international impact while retaining the focus on individual and communal responsibility. Awareness raising is a big part of the daily work members of Tamera community do. This is also seen as a political statement helping to make the old dysfunctional system obsolete: *"The deeper human and political meaning of our peace project is to realise our positive vision of a life lived as completely and consciously aware as possible"* (NR, male, 20s).

The central solutions for moving towards more sustainable way of life according to the Tamera case are listed in the table below.

**Table 14. Overview of the core theme and categories of the Tamera case study.**

| Establishing peace culture | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Meaningful positive vision** | **Community** | **Research attitude** |
| A new societal model | Reconnecting | Openness |
| Non-violence | Healing | Self-study |
| Systems change | Trust in love | Education |
| Holistic worldview | Conflict resolution | Awareness raising |

The core solution for moving towards SD is expressed in the core theme of establishing peace culture, supported by doing meaningful positive vision, recreating community and adopting a research attitude.

### 4.1.1.4. GEN-Europe case study

**Problems.** The main problem is that humanity has destroyed in a short period of time what it took nature billions of years to create, causing major imbalances in life-giving systems. It is argued that free trade and globalisation, claiming to increase human wellbeing, in fact decrease it by widening the inequality gap between the rich and the poor and depriving the economically less developed of their original identity and resources with unrealistic promises of a better life (Shiva 2007, Norberg-Hodge 2009).

The unsustainable nature of current human activities is perceived to be driven by the global growth-oriented economic system, which causes ecological destruction, inequality and violence. It is argued to be based on the dominating worldview of separation, characterised by disconnection – from oneself, other people and nature. The illusion of human separation from the natural world is seen as the root cause for environmental destruction, pollution and waste as well as socio-economic calamities. It contributes to social isolation, erosion of traditional support functions, breakdown of the family, and marginalisation of the weaker members of society. It is linked to the loss of understanding of the fundamental interdependence of life on earth, resulting in irresponsible use of technological advances (e.g. GMO- and fertilizer-driven agriculture). The disconnection culture is also characterised by a dismissal of alternative sources of knowledge, such as indigenous or experiential knowledge, which are highly valued in ecovillages. Ultimately the worldview of separation is considered to contribute to loss of cultural diversity reducing resilience and leading to impoverishment, not progress.

The next big problems are the passivity and ignorance of people and too superficial and small scale of changes. For the majority of people, it has still not become clear that a change of the current way of life is no longer optional if humanity wants to avoid bigger disasters. The current attempts to green production and consumption and adjust the current system are not considered sufficient to meet the pressing need for change; a systems change is deemed necessary. However, if people continue to consider their way of life normal, it will not happen. Thus, in the face of the urgent need for change,

the lacking awareness about our individual and communal responsibility has become one of the biggest obstacles. Many people are unable to grasp the relations between their choices and the negative effects. The formal educational systems are considered insufficient for preparing people for understanding such connections and dealing with complex sustainability challenges.

Further problems include disappointment in short-term politics and top-to-bottom planning. As no alternatives to economic growth, technological innovation and globalisation as remedies for development inequalities are seen on the political level, many GEN-members have lost hope that the political elite will address current problems in an adequate manner and in due time. Lack of political interest and will is seen as one of the root causes why the many warnings about the limits to growth and climate change have remained fruitless. Governments are considered too convenient and dependent on the agreements with the economic elite to lead making sufficient changes. Not being able to trust the people democratically chosen to make wise long-term decisions has also to do with politicians not wishing to make unpopular decisions which might cost relevant votes and political power in the next election circle. This has led to an insufficient consideration of the long-term perspective, which is believed to perpetuate and deepen the crises.

**Solutions for moving towards sustainable development: core theme and categories**

**Simpler reconnected life** emerged as the core theme of this case, summing up the core solution for turning towards sustainable development. The current globalised systems are considered too big and complex, which is one of the reasons for the massive disconnection in different spheres of life. Disconnected people don't take individual or communal responsibility, which has led to the current multiple crises. Losing connection to other people and nature has led to losing respect for life. It is believed that simplifying life makes it easier to restore the lost connections, rediscover the interconnectedness and sacredness of life and exit the worldview of separation. Indeed, what surfaced in the analysis was a shared belief that humanity needs to reconnect to what has been lost by relearning the old, sustainable and connected story of life, forgotten over the centuries of exploitation, colonialism and capitalism – to reconnect to it in order to learn to live in a sustainable manner again. Echoing the ethos of deep ecology, the lived experience of being part of the planet Earth or Gaia without imagining owning or controlling it is vital for healing and reconnecting.

**Counteracting careless consumerism** means participating in developing ecologically responsible economics. One of the detrimental impacts of the progressive homogenisation of foodstuffs, clothing, farming technologies, building materials, styles and value-orientations across the world resulting from the progressively globalised economy, is the weaker connection that people feel to the place where they live, the people around them, the food they eat and the work they do. As a result of this trend, diets in the North have ceased to reflect the changing seasons, disconnecting people from local natural rhythms and facilitating the development of social alienation and careless consumerism.

Supporting ecologically responsible and ethically sound business principles by being aware of the whole life cycle of services and products used and offered by community members contribute to ecological as well as economic sustainability. This is relevant to develop capacity for urban and rural regeneration and disaster mitigation using practices like permaculture and whole systems approach to design. Ecovillages engage in participatory restoration or healing of the local ecosystems by protecting wilderness areas and safeguarding or restoring biological diversity. Building water retention landscapes in Tamera or replanting trees to avoid erosion and desertification in Auroville, India are examples of these activities.

Another option for supporting ecological sustainability is learning to know and respect local food and nutrient cycles including water, energy and infrastructure and using these resources in a

conscious and sparing manner. It also involves implementing appropriate low impact and low energy management and technologies, including both traditional and innovative technologies for building, water treatment, energy production and waste reduction. Ecologically responsible economics also includes preferring local materials, recycling and ecologically sound techniques when building or retrofitting, and using an integrated approach when planning buildings. Reusing, recycling and composting further belong to the skills supporting ecologically responsible economy.

Changing mind-sets is considered one of the primary conditions for the sustainability transition. In fact, GEN also sees it as the key to solving climate problems. As the problems are created by a mind-set based on competition, exploitation, pollution and mutual suspicion, it is believed that it cannot be solved on the same level where it was created, which is why a systems change is needed.

It is suggested that the liberal globalised corporate economic system pumps finances from the communities to big players in the centres. For sustainable development a cooperative or partnership economy not driven by profit-oriented market forces is deemed necessary, making the old economic model based on competition, greed, violence and domination obsolete. Economics is considered sustainable when it respects the right livelihood by supporting the local economy and social enterprise, community banks and currencies to revitalise local economies. This new system should involve far less working hours, reduced production and consumption, and a large cashless sector, which involves sharing, exchange and goods from the local commons. Changing the economic system is deemed possible in the context of a new culture, in which competitive and acquisitive individualism is replaced by frugal, self-sufficient collectivism. Instead of relying on global systems, the ecovillages strive towards high levels of self-sufficiency within households, communities, neighbourhoods, villages, towns and regions.

One of the central ways of attaining sustainable economic development is adopting a **simpler way of life** by embracing more modest living standards as something natural and positive rather than a downfall in the quality of life. According to GEN-E representatives, instead of pursuing quantitative monetary economic growth, minimal to no economic growth is considered necessary and the GDP must become lower than presently. Instead, the growth of qualitative wellbeing and developing and propagating new measuring sticks for prosperity and progress is considered relevant.

Achieving self-sufficiency is possible by **relocalising**. Preferring local businesses, using regional currencies and banks help to keep the money circulating longer in the community, increasing local prosperity and strengthening ties. Limiting travel, transport and trade to support local economies where most of the things needed are produced by local labour from local resources. Preferring local services including health care is another source of raising local prosperity. Being locally grounded, the ecovillage economy strives to be robust and resilient. So relocalisation is a way of reconnecting and increasing the quality of life in the long run. Making changes is always a context-sensitive activity. It is firmly believed that change has to be locally rooted and motivated to be sustainable and that transition cannot be driven or forced on people by the government. On the other hand, locally well-functioning systems can then help to foster the needed whole-system change. Such systems can be built and made to work by the willing efforts of local people who understand why a simpler lifestyle is necessary and rewarding. Only local people know local conditions and social situations, so only they can develop the systems, networks, trust, cooperative climate needed to generate enthusiastic and energetic contributions. Relocalisation also helps to minimise the negative effects of globalisation (e.g. dependence), reconnect to the environment around us and restore trust and community.

The ecovillagers' pursuit at relocalising in terms of food and other products is an attempt to reconnect with the place and rediscover the appreciation for the amount of energy, time and "natural

wonder" needed to grow food to feed a family or a community. Being in immediate contact with food production fosters respect for the people providing the food we eat, and for the nature for making it possible, creating the basis for a different attitude and ethics. This different attitude and ethics is similar to what Aldo Leopold called "land ethics" (see 3.1.1.).

**Simpler life and degrowth.** It is argued that a simpler way of living can actually be more fulfilling, raising the quality of life through relocalisation and voluntary simplicity. Part of taking responsibility in the North is that the ecovillagers are geared towards radically lowering their ecological footprints by consuming less and adopting a simpler way of life. Voluntary simplicity in these settings means communal scaling down of resource use and pollution, while in the South most communities need to 'scale up' in order to meet their basic needs. It is also intimately connected to value change. Attempts for delinking economic growth and accumulation of material wealth and goods from increasing wellbeing can be considered among the core concerns of the ecovillage movement. Jonathan Dawson, the former president of the GEN, has suggested that while the most visible and tangible projects within ecovillages tend to be related to technology, such as ecological housing, biological wastewater treatment systems, renewable energy technologies, or community currencies, the arguably more significant is the contribution of ecovillages to radical transformation of values and consciousness (Dawson 2010). The simple lifestyle and low levels of consumption typically prevailing in ecovillages result from the intention to reduce energy and materials intensity, supporting local instead of far-away economies.

It is especially interesting that many of the activities and design features that are responsible for low energy and resource use within ecovillages are also among the most important in contributing to a better quality of life. The decision by many ecovillages to grow a significant amount of their own food, prepare and eat meals together, create car clubs, community-owned renewable energy facilities, community currencies and investment and so on, involves ecovillagers working cooperatively together in a way that strengthens relationships and builds a strong and nurturing sense of connection with the place. Also reusing and sharing are considered practices with vital importance for downscalinga and turning towards a simpler life.

There is substantial evidence that the quality of life within ecovillages is generally high — for example, the study of Mulder indicates that, despite the average incomes being significantly lower, the quality of life is slightly higher in intentional communities, because of a greater cultivation and appreciation of other forms of capital, especially social capital (Mulder et al. 2006). Ecovillagers see their simpler, more reconnected and localised lifestyle not as optional, but as an unavoidable result of the current processes.

**New culture** emerged as the second core category of this case. At the basis of the GEN-E perspective to sustainable development is disenchantment with the current competitive, destructive and unjust way of life and striving towards a fairer and more fulfilling way of life. According to this perspective, having a shared positive vision, which can be called a new story, is highly important for achieving the needed transition towards SD. The need for a new story, new paradigm, or new culture based on a positive vision of human development is seen as the missing link and ecovillages as the places creating it. Building a truly life-sustaining culture to counteract the alienation of the individual due to the institutionalisation of traditional support functions, the breakdown of the family, and the marginalisation of the weaker members of society counts as a significant contribution to sustainability transition. It means focusing also on the often neglected aesthetic, immaterial, invisible, informational and emotional sides of human development. Creativity, artistic expression, rituals and celebrations are seen as relevant means for keeping up the cultural vitality, positive vision and shared intentionality that support unity. In the GEN perspective, the culture of sustainability is based on a holistic

worldview appreciating the interconnectedness and interdependence of humanity and the rest of life on Earth as one community.

GEN-Europe recognises a deep need for having a new positive story of the future to boost the resurgence of culture, ethics, communities, spirit of trust and collaboration, relocalisation and downscaling, respect for the wisdom inherent in nature and indigenous cultures, empowerment of communities to design their own pathway into the future, reconciliation and narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor, openness to learning and awareness raising. Their holistic worldview supports recognising transformation of consciousness as the basis for reconnecting to self, others and nature as sources for health, healing and socially engaged spirituality.

The current era of multiple crises is interpreted as a big adventure and opportunity. Having an inspiring shared vision consolidates energy and efforts and can make a big difference: *"If one person dreams alone, it remains a dream. If many start dreaming together it is the beginning of a new reality"* (ME, female, 60s). The ecovillage movement intends to work in a win-win framework instead of the win-lose situation. Finding new models for local development and sharing ideas and good practices about holistic alternative development directions creates a basis for joint visioning.

**Taking responsibility.** Each individual and group of people is seen to carry responsibility for their actions and choices in making this paradigm change and birth of a new story happen in the face of big dangers. Taking personal as well as communal responsibility is a relevant precondition for reconciliation. To say that the ecovillagers are idealists happy with growing their own tomatoes, but with a limited interest in the global SD-issues indicates limited knowledge of the GEN network. The GEN-E does not consider it sufficient when the rich northerners go on talking about and experimenting with "ideal" communities while feeling isolated from and ignoring the vast majority of the rest of the human population. The GEN has recently opened up to traditional villages to support them in their transition to sustainability, as thousands of traditional and indigenous villages around the world are currently in danger of losing their social, cultural, ecological and economic cohesion due to the challenges and adverse impacts of globalisation, including excessive privatisation and pollution (GEN-E 2013c). GEN representatives see that much value and traditional knowledge is being lost in this process and seek to affirm locals that their knowledge is valuable. Thus the relationship between the North and the South is rather seen as a partnership and mutually beneficial learning situation. In the context of development cooperation, where the North often preaches what they are not doing themselves, the GEN is in a position to establish partnerships between projects on an equal basis, as the authenticity of actually walking their talk in lowering ecological footprints and living a simpler life attracts interest and respect from projects in the South. In fact, they turn the tables in not speaking about what the South should learn from the North but also emphasise how much the North have to learn from deep-rooted wisdom still alive within Southern cultures, settlements and projects. Grassroots leaders recognise in each other a similar sense of responsibility for global environmental and social justice, which creates a good basis for cooperation. Ecovillagers are doing this through personal commitment and responsibility despite limited resources and governmental support. By walking their talk, they aim to provide an example of lived alternatives and facilitate the transformation process, which they believe everybody has to go through sooner or later as part of an on-going gradual planetary transformation. Because of the stress on personal and communal transformation, the Gaia Trust decided to support the creation of this network decades ago and still firmly believe that they can make a significant contribution.

Change starts with **individual change** and results in a global peace culture of sufficiency. The ecovillage solution starts from individuals and communities one heart at a time but reaches up to healing the planet, which is facilitated by the belief in the holistic interconnectedness of the web of life. "*Everybody makes an impact that matters*" (ME, female, 60s) is an important inclusive

empowering message of the network. As the ecovillage solutions start from the individuals, paramount importance is ascribed to becoming aware about the impact of individual choices: *"We humans live the destiny of our choices, and it is now every person's duty to aspire for the highest level of consciousness. This is the only way that we can create a hopeful future. What is demanded now is a vast shift in human consciousness"* (Strong 2012: 104).

The responsibility for finding viable alternatives and putting them into practice is seen to lie on the individual and communal levels: *"Will the governments take leadership or will change have to come from below? In the current critical turning point in time it is up to us to take the lead – we are the ones we have been waiting for"* (ME, female, 60s). Similarly to Lilleoru, also for the GEN-E the transition to a better, more sustainable human society starts with(in) each individual, with a direction from inside out. It then spreads through the relationships to other people, to the communities, to nature and the rest of the world. The overall goal is to contribute to building a new global cooperative peace culture of sufficiency, which would substitute the current reactive, competitive, fearful and violent scarcity culture striving towards growth and efficiency.

The need for a **shift in human consciousness** is a central topic in several ecovillages, especially in Lilleoru and Tamera. It is the experience of many ecovillagers, also in Sieben Linden, that although they begin with ecological concerns, the undertaking of changing their entire lifestyle is "a highway to spiritual transformation" (SS, female, 20s). There are different methods for "peeling the onion" (ibid), but the aim of raising awareness is shared, even if the nature of the shift of consciousness and the level of awareness aimed at differs from community to community.

In the GEN-E **holistic approach**, inner change is seen as the key for outer change. A good example is the way inner change is directly linked to the climate change challenge. Ecovillage representatives have argued (e.g. Jackson 2009: 40-41) that the governmental efforts will not bear fruit as dealing with climate change issues needs a higher level of thinking. The competitive mindset that created the crisis needs to be left behind and a move to a higher, cooperative mindset must be established. In this mindset, qualities such as moderation, efficiency, sustainability, equality, fairness and social balance override individual interests. The majority of ecovillagers do not stand behind the perception that humanity is doomed by nature to always want more: more consumption, more wealth, more new things and experiences. Instead, they consider it the human nature to long for interconnectedness and oneness. Thus climate change is not seen as something which must be fought against so much with technological means, but more a challenge to be dealt with by inner climate change (Jackson 2009). Thus the solution offered by GEN members is essentially starting on the inside. Combating climate change is considered an opportunity to break with the past, to look anew at the way we operate when relating to ourselves, to each other and to nature. There are mixed opinions as to whether achieving a higher level of thinking would also require accepting a new higher level institution above nation states looking for a fair solution in the interest of all world´s citizens and the environment. However, the key to solving the climate problem is seen to lie in the transformation of human consciousness. Thus next to the energy systems also the inner systems need updating. As an interviewee put it: *"We have to change our interiors as much as our exteriors to achieve sustainable development"* (ME, female, 60s).

The holistic approach to SD is also expressed in the belief that small changes can have a big impact. There is firm confidence that ecovillagers and ecovillages with their wisdom and experiences hold a great potential which the world is asking for: people are hungry for solutions, for real things that work, and GEN has many answers for tackling the challenge described as *the Great Turning* (Macy 2012).

**Respect for life.** GEN-E attributes great importance to regarding humanity and the planet Earth as one organic and intelligent living organism, or 'body of humanity' as Elisabet Sahtouris is

telling in her *Earthdance* (2009 [2000]). Many ecovillagers see their role in facilitating this shift, from empowering people one heart at a time to transition on a bigger scale that has been called transition politics in the GEN circles, paving the way towards Gaian politics.

The explicit inclusion of the spiritual aspects or the notion of something holy or sacred sets the GEN approach apart from many others. The invisible and inner aspects such as spirituality and sense of sacredness are regarded relevant for the transition to a more sustainable way of life. Reconnecting to the dimension of sacredness was a recurrent theme in all ecovillage case studies, albeit with a different intensity. Sacredness means in the ecovillage context most of all respect for life – both visible and invisible life. In this respect the individual ecovillages in the network have relatively different practices. Most often nature and the planet Earth as a living organism Gaia are respected as sacred. However, spirituality is by no means regarded uniformly in the GEN and is respected and supported in its various manifestations. This manner of spiritual openness and diversity joining different traditions from different corners of the planet is characteristic to new age spirituality (Tago 2009). Also, the relevance of raising awareness and living ethically and respectfully is considered to belong to this sphere. There are voices in the GEN suggesting that talking about spirituality might undermine the accountability and respectability of GEN as a partner in political negotiations.

Interview partners with different educational and experiential backgrounds and a varying level of immersion and information building up and developing ecovillages remarked that they often have more in common with each other than with peers in their respective local cultures, no matter where they come from. A common, global vision or narrative that cuts across cultural, racial, and religious differences can be clearly discerned and is believed to have the power to change the world. On the worldview level, the ecovillage movement offers a grassroots response to the currently dominant brutally and functionally competitive and unjust consumerist culture. By greater investment in social capital, they rebuild community and a sense of solidarity in the midst of a culture over-emphasising individualism.

**Sustainable communities** is the third core category of this case. Representatives of the GEN believe that community-based bottom-up solutions must be implemented to solve the multifaceted problems causing unsustainability and create significant pressure to push power structures to action. The bottom-up solutions also help to avoid ending up with a dictate from the state or the multinational corporations on how people should live. The interviewed representatives of GEN-E argued that before changing the world, things need to be put in order in "our own house" in the North by building sustainable communities and giving up exploiting the rest of the world.

The current system causes social isolation with depressed people living separated lives even if they live next to each other. This separation illusion can be overcome by reconnecting to self, to each other as a community, to the place of living, to the nature and to something bigger and more meaningful, like the community of life on planet Earth. To counteract isolation and disconnection, the GEN promotes reconnecting to the community and other living beings as a necessary condition for the SD-transition. Ecovillages are built to be places that allow people to reconnect.

Community is central to the ecovillage solution as it is believed that a low-carbon lifestyle is possible within vibrant and well-designed communities, delivering both human well-being and planetary sustainability: *"We believe that sustainable communities are the appropriate scale from which to begin organising the birthing of the new culture; it cannot be done as solitary individuals or at the abstract level of societies"* (ME, female, 60s).

As living experiments in sustainability, ecologically minded communities are seen as the solution, demonstrating that it is possible to live well within planetary limits, with some member communities having some of the lowest per capita carbon footprints per settlement in the industrialised

world as well as democratic self-governance within socially inclusive communities (Norberg-Hodge 2009). Reconnecting to the community is considered empowering. In a well-functioning community, qualities such as taking responsibility, equality, mutual respect, openness, readiness for communication and non-violence play a significant role when ensuring that a group of people are able to live together for a long time. As the community functions as a mirror, it is considered a very useful, although not an easy experience to live in one for personal growth. For community life to function, trust is needed. In order for trust to unfold, healing from or letting go of disturbing memories and experiences is advocated for. This requires skills for dealing with interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts.

Re-establishing and reviving community is one of the key aspects for ecovillagers on their way towards living more sustainably. Community **empowers** by enabling lifelong learning, meaningful work and sustenance for all members and supporting a proactive, responsible attitude of personal leadership. Also marginal groups are integrated into the community, as social sustainability includes embracing diversity when relating to others, sharing common resources and providing mutual aid. This also includes the recognition and use of holistic and preventive health and healing practices. A further central aspect is connected to changing the way of life to voluntary simplicity by developing local, bioregional and finally also global alternatives to consumerism. Reviving communities also requires slowing down and taking time to relearn how to communicate, how to resolve conflicts, how to build trust and love and live together in a peaceful community. The great benefit of being part of a community is that the mutual trust allows space for each one to find their own role in the whole. This lends a deep sense of belonging to the group, to the place and to nature, which empowers. Being thus empowered encourages people to participate and make decisions on a transparent basis. It also helps to take responsibility for oneself and those around and find inner motivation for making a difference.

Also, **diversity** belongs to a community. Diversity means tolerance for all the different people with their various backgrounds coming to live in one setting. In permaculture teaching commonly used by ecovillagers, diversity is considered the basis for resilience, and as such, also a community is considered strong when it has different people. **Non-violence** is an expression of respecting diversity. This includes avoiding violence in all its forms from individual emotional pain to interpersonal violence such as discrimination or war, or violence towards nature such as destroying entire landscapes and biosystems for the sake of economic profit. Creating trust instead of fear, patterns of healing instead of patterns of hurt is sustainable; suppressing, denying and hiding creates problems, blockages and diseases. It involves creating new conflict resolution skills. The community is important in supporting non-violence and enabling the recreation of honesty, trust and a necessary support in the healing process. Interviewees mentioned several times that violent patterns are very often connected with the fields of love and sexuality, and these need special attention and healing. It is believed that reconnecting also means **reconciliation** with self, with nature, between the genders, and between the global South and North. The intention to contribute to the North-South reconciliation has been present in GEN since its beginning, but it is since the end of the 2000nds that GEN-Europe has taken a more active hand in participating through its educational offerings and by supporting the emergence of GEN Africa (GEN-E 2013b).

**Cooperation.** It is believed that to re-establish community, people need to relearn how to cooperate and share with each other. Since the mid 2000nds there has been a clear change of direction from creating ecovillages as green islands to being living examples of functioning sustainable alternatives and places of inspiration and knowledge. GEN has broadened its scope and opened to existing, and traditional, as well as urban communities. So for about the past ten years the focus has been on sharing the best ecovillage practices with each other and the rest of the world. This includes disseminating information about ecovillages and their activities via books, websites, conferences,

newsletters and education. Regarding impact and dissemination, the gradual opening has led to new cooperations, mainly in the form of cooperation projects. Especially active is the field of (adult) education, broadening the scope of activities to facilitate change.

An understanding of the importance of combining efforts instead of working in isolation is strongly felt, and GEN is seen as a great structure for this. However, in the first decade of its existence, many member ecovillages were more concerned with building up internal structures, solving problems and finding alternative ways, which was also reflected in the activities of GEN-E. GEN-E started to cooperate more actively with different stakeholders since the mid-2000nds. As a grassroots non-profit umbrella organisation, the GEN-E links together a diverse group of projects supporting the experimental creation and preservation of low impact lifestyles by cooperating with small-scale local groups, governments on a national level, other networks (such as the TN), as well as international macro-players such as the EU, or UN structures such as the UNITAR. Opening the movement to traditional villages and urban settlements in the last decade, as well as developing ecovillage education programs and book series has helped to raise the profile of GEN. Several respondents described how the movement and the status of individual ecovillage(r)s went through a transition in the mid 2000nds from being considered marginal eco-crooks to being increasingly sought after by the wider society as eco-experts and consultants (Dawson 2007).

Cooperation with politics had not been very active. Despite attempts to cooperate, trust in the political and governance systems is not strong, which is why the meaningfulness of attempting to establish contacts with mainstream governance, business and media to catalyse the transformation of the current system is continually questioned in the network. The attitude towards power structures and businesses is generally critical and sceptical. The limits to growth line of reasoning is clearly present in questioning if the dominant society and civilization models causing pollution, extinction of species, continually rising energy consumption, using up non-renewable natural resources, and unlimited consumerism have a future in the context of the finite global ecosystem and one Earth (Dawson 2009: 20). Governments are seen as relevant partners as they can support or hinder the turn towards sustainability; however, much hope is not placed in the change-making potential of the power-structures. For GEN the protection of local values is relevant, while political ideas and practices across Europe lean towards globalisation and free trade, lessening the value of locality (the Lisbon Treaty and its successor, Europe 2020 were mentioned in this regard). Thus GEN aims to build broader coalitions to support their perspective. GEN united both people who prefer cooperation and those who consider cooperation attempts a pure waste of time and energy, and accordingly follows both paths: cooperation and contact attempts, as well as autonomy building (Dawson 2009). Some ecovillagers ponder if it would be better to stop such attempts as dead ends and instead invest all their strength into building up local, community centred and autonomous communities, however, it is concluded that keeping both options open and in development is the safest option.

Interestingly, climate issues were only marginally, if at all, mentioned in the interviews with ecovillagers; however, on the network level, this issue is more present. This is explained by GEN-s cooperation with the United Nations. E.g. during the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Conference (COP) all three civil society case study movements joined forces and participated in a the program of an alternative meeting called the "NGO Forum II: Climate Bottom Meeting – Windows of Hope"[13]. Under the slogan "*One Earth, one humanity, one climate!*", the meeting provided an alternative perspective including sessions on cultural and spiritual dimensions of climate change and sustainability and the power of a participatory and community approach to making a difference

[13] GEN-E co-organised it with two Copenhagen Agenda 21 centres and the Network for the Conservation of Christiania on 5.-18.12.2009.

featuring also representatives of GEN-E, Transition network and LDI network, as well as representatives of Lilleoru and Sieben Linden as invited speakers.

**Sustainability education.** Education, and more specifically individual, mutual and lifelong learning, is the fourth core category offered as a solution for transitioning towards more sustainable ways of life. GEN has developed a range of educational programs, mainly for grownups, to upscale local knowledge and help to spread it. Lifelong learning helps to connect to new information, new experiences and people, to form innovative ideas and foster sustainability.

Educational programs such as EDE, GEDS, and T2R (co)developed by GEN offer tried and tested ecological, economic, social and cultural solutions to the crises. It is believed that creative education helps to unleash community creativity and enable innovation, revitalising and respecting traditional local wisdom while integrating contemporary methods, technologies and insights where appropriate. Education helps to inspire and empower people and communities and counts as a slow, but sure way of change-making. Aware and empowered, it is believed that the power of human communities to come together and co-design their own pathway into the future is a major driving force for positive change: *"The most underutilised resource we have today is the good intentions and creativity of citizens, and their willingness to make a difference"* (Joubert 2010: 16-17).

Changing the mindset requires **openness to different ways of knowing**. A relevant aspect in ecovillage perception is their acceptance of different types of knowledge next to scientifically proven and conventionally accepted knowledge. This knowledge, considered critical to sustainable development, includes practical, experiential and locally based knowledge gathered over the years. This includes reconnecting to the wisdom of the old civilizations and indigenous cultures. Indigenous peoples, for example the Native Americans, are regarded as experts in sustainable way of life as instead of living in separation, they live as members of the greater community of life without harming it. Respecting life and its balance as sacred is considered the core message of the old cultures and seen as a relevant contribution to the current attempts to achieve SD. This also involves the preservation and development of knowledge, and practice of traditional and natural healing methods such as medicinal herbs and mineral substances. Respecting different ways of knowing also includes valuing local knowledge of the "underdeveloped" countries of the South and ceasing to use the colonialist mindsets. To avoid the danger that the Western development path wipes out the Southern lifestyles along with its practical wisdom, there must be much more respect for preserving *local wisdom and sustainable traditions, while creatively merging these with innovative technologies, where appropriate*. This merger of old and new knowledge can take place in an environment that leaves room for **experimenting to find and develop new solutions.** GEN members have experimented for decades with different aspects of sustainable living and have generated a wealth of experience, technologies and techniques to pass on regarding social, cultural, ecological and economic SD. This calls for openness to try out new ways, to change and to learn new skills (reskilling) to adapt to the situation, changing needs and interests of people. Flexibility and lifelong learning are important topics here; practical value and usability serve as measures. This sort of investigative spirit gives ground for calling GEN member communities research places, places of intentional exploration towards high quality, low maintenance way of life combining traditional and state of the art technologies and practices in a new, community-centred settlement form.

Since the early 2000nds more and more member communities of GEN started to focus on outreach spreading their tried and tested methods and tools for sustainability transition. Being represented in high-profile international conferences like COP 2009 or Rio+20, developing useful web resources and disseminating knowledge and experiences via books, articles and educational programs belong to the preferred tools used by the GEN-Europe. Echoing the widely spread saying "Be the

change you want to see in the world," teaching by example is the preferred method in the GEN network. The diversity of member communities creates a richness of expertise and experiences to learn from.

**Mutual learning and outreach**. The educational programs offered by GEN-E are the result of mutual learning. The experiences made in ecovillages when exploring, developing, testing and using practices aiming to increase personal, communal and societal wellbeing across nations and settings have been channelled into outreach activities. By joining the experiences of individual ecovillages together, the network seeks to make their contributions more visible to support SD. The efforts for consolidating ecovillage knowledge and experiences into educational content started back in 1998 and resulted in 2005 in the sustainability education program called Gaia Education. It includes the 4-week Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) and the 10-month online Gaia Education Design for Sustainability (GEDS) programs. To facilitate mutual learning the EDE curriculum is made available on the Gaia Education website for free in six languages for self-study. Also four books covering the four aspects of sustainability were published with the purpose of sharing ecovillage experiences and knowledge (Joubert and Alfred 2007; Dawson, Jackson and Norberg-Hodge 2010; Harland and Keepin 2012; Mare and Lindegger 2011). GEN has evolved into a learning network supporting mutual learning not only between ecovillagers and ecovillages, but with a broader circle of interested stakeholders. Working in partnership with universities, governments, NGOs and agencies, the GEN educational outreach aims to distribute knowledge about the holistic design of sustainable urban and rural settlements. For example, the EDE curriculum also served as GEN´s official contribution to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014).

The central solutions for achieving more sustainable development according to the GEN-Europe case are listed in the table below, summing up the core theme, categories and key properties.

**Table 15. Overview of the core theme and categories of GEN-Europe case study.**

| **Simpler reconnected life** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Counteracting careless consumerism** | **New culture** | **Sustainable communities** | **Sustainability education** |
| Change of mind-sets | Taking responsibility | Fostering trust and healing | Lifelong learning |
| Simpler way of life | Transformation of consciousness | Diversity and non-violence | Experimenting for new solutions |
| Relocalising | Holistic approach | Reconciliation and empowerment | Mutual learning |
| Reusing and sharing | Respect for life | Cooperation | Openness for alternative knowledge |

Simpler reconnected life emerged as the central solution with counteracting careless consumerism, creating a new culture, establishing sustainable communities and fostering sustainability education as the central fields of activity leading to a simpler, reconnected life.

### 4.1.1.5. Analysis of the ecovillage cases

It is striking that although the local differences seem big at first, there are a lot of underlying common features both in the initiatives themselves as in their understanding of sustainable development. The core themes are pretty close, just the degree of investment in certain topics varies from case to case. This section starts with a comparative summarising analysis of the SD approaches of the GEN cases.

All the case study groups are intentionally founded rural communities that joined the GEN network on the basis of shared values as already functioning communities. All gained good reputation over the years as good cooperation partners for local municipalities, bringing new people to the countryside, serving as local tourist attractions and helping to enliven local economies.

The economic aspects seem to be the least developed aspect across the cases from the four GEN SD aspects. This is not unique to these cases. As known from social movement research (Staggenborg 2007, Tago 2009, Allaste 2011), most of the communal experiments in history have failed due to inability to failure to establish a viable economic base or deal with conflicts. Having persisted for 25 years or longer, all the GEN cases found solutions to these problems. To foster the sustainability of their communities, all cases were intentionally working to establishing a strong vision and well-functioning structures viable to carry on for a long time, outlasting the generations change and loss of founders as a place of communal living and as a knowledge hub with a specific vision.

In terms of the current pace and scale of change the opinions differed. In Sieben Linden and Tamera, there was more disappointment with the slow and local pace of change, arguing that growing your own tomatoes is not enough in the face of global violence against nature and other people. In Lilleoru and GEN-E the slow pace and scale, also described as "one heart at the time" approach, was seen in a more relaxed manner as an inevitable part of change. In all cases people were convinced that it does not make sense to wait for somebody else – like politicians or officials – to make the differences. Instead, there was a silent consensus that changes need to be made now, starting with oneself. The readiness to take responsibility to make a difference was a relevant common trait across the cases. As several interview partners put it: "we are the people we have been waiting for" (Sieben Linden), "be the change you want to see in the world – create a new reality" (Tamera) or "change yourself and the world around you changes" (Lilleoru).

It is the holistic worldview, shared by all cases to some degree that informs these attitudes to change-making. It lends people certain peace so that even in the face of severe global sustainability challenges they are more or less ok with the small steps that they can make, believing that their efforts are not in vain, that they do make a difference. The holistic worldview gives confidence that changing oneself (the microlevel, individuals and communities) will impact also the global macrostructures. So the direction of change runs from individuals to communities and macrostructures. As an example of a fully-fledged holistic worldview, Tamera´s healing biotope vision suggests (referring to Rupert Sheldrake in Shermer 2005), that once they find sustainable living solutions in all spheres of human life, these solutions would become available to the whole humanity via shared consciousness. So although people in Tamera have needed decades for developing these solutions, it is believed that once they are ready, they will be accessible to humanity almost instantly through the shared consciousness[14].

Indeed, the concepts of consciousness and awareness (often in relation to the concept of change) were considered by most cases highly relevant for making the necessary changes and achieving SD. However, the way these concepts are understood, differs. As discussed above, in Tamera people are sure of the existence of a shared human consciousness. This is also why they learn not to take their emotional experiences personally – as they are all part of the human shared consciousness and individuals simply express certain patterns in their daily lives. In Lilleoru, on the other hand, learning to reconnect and keep the connection to the individual consciousness is considered the primary task. In the holistic spirit it is indeed believed that changing oneself will also change the surrounding world. It is believed that once people start to use their consciousness as a

[14] In comparison to other ecovillage cases, the rhetoric of Tamera is more expressive and dramatic. It is also the only case in the sample that explicitly describes itself as utopia, social laboratory and a project for global peace.

basis for daily life instead of emotions and thoughts, their whole relationship with the world changes, becoming much more respectful and cooperative, gradually transforming also the social, ecological and economic practices to more sustainable ones. So in all cases, to a different degree, the ecovillage solutions rely to a certain degree on a holistic worldview. It is believed that small changes can unleash big processes and that inner transformations (change of consciousness or mindset) also directly guide outer transformations.

In a way all cases considered themselves living models for sustainable human development having the needed know-how to help to make significant contributions to solving many of the pressing problems of our time. However, whereas GEN-E sees itself as a network rich in lived sustainability related experiences and practices, Sieben Linden and Tamera see themselves as living models of sustainable development. Lilleoru differs here from the other cases by being more modest and considering itself primarily a living example of achieving inner, personal sustainability and based on that, developing new ways of conscious cooperation.

Education and openness for mutual learning and change were relevant aspects in all cases. The contents of educational offers ranged from ecological to personal sustainability, depending on the context. All ecovillages served as educational hubs and knowledge centres with different strengths: Lilleoru as a knowledge centre for intrapersonal knowledge and skills, Tamera and Sieben Linden as hubs for interpersonal (social) and ecological knowledge. The GEN-E focused on both aspects, but the interpersonal and ecological emphasis was stronger. All cases were hubs of ecological education teaching about restoring nature, green building and retrofitting, growing local food, sparing and caring use of water, energy, infrastructure and nutrient cycles, offering education to foster long-term interconnected development**.** However, in all cases there were people who visited for other purposes as people were able to learn about themselves, community, conflict resolution and ecologically sound practices in all ecovillages. The dominant educational systems were considered insufficient to prepare people for the challenges of our time. For preparing people for understanding and dealing with the complex challenges at hand, they suggested new experience based education focusing less on learning certain abstract things and more on acquiring practical skills and having an open, experimental attitude and courage to ask questions. It was believed that offering new types of experiences, knowledge and skills to increase (self)reflexivity, understanding of interconnectedness and responsible behaviour would help to change the formal and outdated educational systems. Formal or informal, experience-based education was seen as an important tool for overcoming disconnection and reversing the gradual disintegration of supportive socio-cultural structures and destructive environmental practices. Reskilling was considered crucial for a more sustainable way of life as many people have lost basic skills of doing things themselves, making them dependent on the energy intensive, polluting and unjust system. As educational offers were among the prime sources of income for most ecovillages, they had developed a range of educational formats. They also shared their experiences by being open to visitors to spread their knowledge and inspire change.

Noteworthy is also the the reoccurrence of re-s. When looking at the core categories of the cases, there are a lot of re-s: reconnecting, relocalising, reviving, reskilling, relearning, restoring, regaining etc. This mirrors a belief that progress is not only linear, that it was not so bad in the past, that there was a lot that has gone missing and that we need to restore and relearn to turn towards more sustainable development.

Reconnecting is a strongly reoccurring code in these cases. Worldview of separation characterised by short-sightedness and inability to grasp interconnections and consequences are seen as results of the currently dominating system with an external focus. All cases use and have developed accessible practices and methods for combating disconnection – each case in their own manner. What is shared is the emphasis for reconnecting to nature. All ecovillage cases have been or are still engaged

in restoration of nature to a certain extent. In the rhetoric of Sieben Linden, Tamera and GEN the current consumer society with its passive and convenient people is seen as societal sickness that needs to be healed. Reconnecting is suggested as a cure. There is a shared belief that disconnection has happened due to many negative experiences and being hurt on the personal and communal levels so individual and communal healing must take place to relearn to trust and be able to reconnect to something that is bigger than the self, to a dimension that can be described as sacred. In Lilleoru it is not described as healing, but the need for regaining respect and reconnecting to something bigger than oneself is the same. In terms of social reconnecting, the emphasis is on learning to be a part of a community and building up and deepening interpersonal communicative skills for solving conflicts and facilitating processes in a non-violent manner. However, the specific methods used across cases vary. The individual practices for reconnecting are even more diverse across the cases.

There was a shared understanding that the current lack of a positive vision of human development has led to passivity, complacency and disempowerment. People are disappointed in politics with its top-to-bottom solutions, short term visions and planning, where nobody seems to have responsibility. Having a positive vision and doing meaningful work are seen as keys to empowering and inspiring people to overcome their passivity and making the change happen. So, all cases argue for a paradigm shift towards a more aware, empowering story or a culture of a paradigm to find solutions to the crisis. This shows the relevance of the worldview/cultural aspects.

In terms of understanding sustainable development, is an essential sense of being connected with the rest of life, having respect for it and using only what is needed without excesses. This perception is close to that of numerous indigenous people´s perception: when I take, I also give back, and I don´t take more than I need in order to preserve the Earth for the coming generations. As Lilleoru community members expressed it:

> *"The broader meaning of sustainability is to live in a way that does not harm. This is in a broader sense the way of life which allows the rest of the world to live as well"* (EG, female, 40s).
>
> *"My view is very close to the indigenous peoples – being in balance with the surrounding nature and not using more than you need"* (AG, female, 30s).

So in this sense the transformation towards sustainability is seen to start from the individual becoming aware of the interconnectedness and taking responsibility for their wishes and actions. This responsible stance is seen to spread on from individuals to communities and gradually change also the societal macrostructures – like drops of water making a hole in a stone.

In all individual ecovillages the SD concept itself was mostly used by people who have more contact with the outer world, for example by working in the planning or permaculture bureaus, or visiting conferences. Such people often considered the concept overexploited and depleted of meaning because "everything can be considered sustainable nowadays" and "one cannot trust the labels anymore". In that context, other concepts, like resilience or viability, were more often used. The differentiation between sustainability and sustainable development concepts was mostly not made and if, not consistently; instead, the concepts were used as synonyms and understood as holistic, integral concepts encompassing the same aspects. Rather than discussing the meaning of the abstract concept of SD, related issues tend to be discussed through practical application in terms of how to build and renovate the buildings, how to garden or what to buy to minimise negative impacts.

From the civil society cases in the sample the GEN-E has the most elaborate and comprehensive SD-model, distinguishing between worldview, social, economic and ecological dimensions of sustainable development. These are seen as mutually reinforcing and necessary for a healthy personal and community development. However, even though the GEN-E SD model was included as data in the analysis, the resulting core theme and categories differed from this SD-model.

The GEN-E focuses much more on cooperation with the political level than the other ecovillage cases that are busy developing their structures and trust more in their holistic understanding that by making a difference themselves, the world around them also changes.

As discussed under education above, the ecovillages focus on different SD aspects according to their individual motivation and external settings. In all three individual cases all four SD aspects are considered, but each ecovillage has its areas of expertise – some are stronger in worldview and cultural sustainability (Lilleoru), some in social sustainability (Tamera) and others in ecological sustainability (Sieben Linden). None of the cases in the sample focused on economics, although the urgent need to change the unsustainable economic system was shared across the cases. Among all the civil society case studies attention to the inner dimensions are most explicitly present in the ecovillage cases and especially in the rhetoric and practices of Lilleoru. According to their perspective, it is the almost exclusively external focus on efficiency, gain and quantitative growth that has brought about serious problems including increasing inequality between people or overconsumption causing environmental pollution and depletion of natural resources. In the cases of Lilleoru and GEN-E, and to a certain extent also in Tamera, the inner changes are explicitly presented as solutions to external problems. GEN-E representatives have argued that to stop climate change, the inner climate needs change first. The people of Tamera argue that by becoming aware and stopping the conflicts between the genders, it is possible to recreate trust and healing, which will also help to stop the global violence. The Lilleoru and GEN-E cases express the strongest need to balance the external focus with more attention to the inner dimension and its processes. The balancing act of inner and outer sustainability requires building up self-awareness to stop following blindly the norms and values of the unsustainable system. In Lilleoru the inner and outer ecology are seen in an interconnected manner. Sustainability is considered to start at the individual level by becoming aware of the inner processes motivating unsustainable processes and learning to regulate them. As the community members put it: *"Once the inner world is balanced and cleaned up, the person does ecologically sound decisions also towards the outer world"* (IG, male, 50s). So in this approach, developing more sustainable ways of life involves not only sparing handling of physical resources, but also of the non-material inner resources.

Sustainability is seen by all ecovillage cases as something that starts from the worldview aspect and individual change – from individual relationships with nature and other living beings. This brings us to the topics of respect, responsibility and sacredness. The current dominant system is seen to lack respect for the surrounding world. In Lilleoru, Tamera and GEN-E, and to a lesser extent also in Sieben Linden, this relationship goes beyond respect and can be described as a sense of sacredness expressed in reverence of life in its various expressions. This, in turn, can be described as a spiritual approach. In fact, the founding idea of GEN was to support the transition to a sustainable future society, described as balanced, healthy and more spiritual (Jackson 1998: 1). This shared sense of deep respect for life in its various expressions shows the coherence and primacy of the holistic worldview that underlies the SD approach of all ecovillage cases. In fact, they all share the – more or less explicitly expressed – belief that the worldview aspect is the key to sustainability transition. So it can be summarised that although the worldview aspect was not explicitly central in all the cases, there is a shared understanding that the current world lacks a positive vision and a change in the value systems is required to support sustainable development.

**A synthesis of the ecovillage approach to sustainable development**

Summing up this discussion, a succinct synthesis of the ecovillage cases based on their core problems and core solutions follows. In terms of the central problems causing unsustainability, four shared concerns emerged. The destructive, wasteful and unequal nature of the global growth-oriented consumer society emerged as the overarching problem across the cases. The next issue is the

worldview of separation, caused by the lack of a positive vision. The result is social isolation and disconnection from self, from other people, from the place of living, from the nature, from the consequences of one´s action. This causes the next problem: people are resigned, passive and irresponsible, trying to live their lives as well as possible without much consideration of the wider impact of their choices. The fourth problem is that due to the inadequate educational system, people have serious lack of awareness and skills for turning towards more sustainable ways of life.

When looking at all these issues together, it becomes clear that disconnection is the common denominator of these problems, causing the unsustainable system as well as passive people with lacking awareness and skills. Disconnection from the self, from the others and nature, is considered the key problem so reconnecting is considered the key to unlocking the problem. People have often lost community in the sense of lasting connections to other people and consequently experience social isolation erosion of traditional support functions, breakdown of the family, and marginalisation of the weaker members of society consequently aggravating the existing inequality further. Disconnection is seen as an illusion with real consequences that have led to pollution, wastefulness, competition, inequality and violence towards other people and animals and destruction of nature. All this is considered the result of a worldview of separation and a lack of a positive, inspiring vision. **L**acking awareness/ignorance of interconnectedness of life is the result of this worldview. The disconnection means that people don't have the ability to grasp the consequences of their actions. They don't have to work for their food as it gets shipped in from all over the world, without having to pay a fair price nor reflecting on the accompanying social and environmental costs for this luxury. It is maintained by the educational system that is not sufficient for preparing people for grasping and solving the challenges at hand.

**Which are the ecovillage solutions to these problems?** Looking at the individual core themes and categories of the cases, five aspects are mentioned: new culture/positive vision/paradigm change toward reconnecting and facilitating an inclusive, cooperative and peaceful transformation of consciousness, primacy of inner change, simpler, relocalised and downscaled way of life to counteract careless consumerism and take responsibility, recreating sustainable communities to empower people and educational reform/sustainability education/research attitude to foster openness for mutual and lifelong learning.

**Table 16. GEN cases: core themes and categories for moving towards SD.**

| Case | Core themes and concepts: reconnecting |
|---|---|
| **Lilleoru** | **Conscious awareness as new paradigm**: primacy of inner change, positive vision, educational reform |
| **Sieben Linden** | **Simpler responsible life**: downscaling for a simpler life, recreating community, education |
| **Tamera** | **Establishing peace culture**: meaningful positive vision, community, research attitude |
| **GEN-E** | **Simpler reconnected life**: counteracting consumerism, new culture, sustainable communities, sustainability education |
| **SUM** | **Reconnecting:** new culture, simpler responsible life, reviving community, educational reform |

Whereas other topics are reoccurring, the primacy of inner change appears as a core category only in the case of Lilleoru, which reflects the relevance of this issue in their SD perception. In all the other cases the content of this core category is covered by the codes of education and new culture, so this will also be done in the synthesised approach. Consequently, the core categories of the ecovillage cases are: new culture, simpler responsible life, reviving community and educational reform. These four solutions are also aligned as answers to the four main problems: adopting a simpler and

responsible way of life is the key to changing the unsustainable system; paradigm change to a new culture is the key to overcoming the worldview of separation; recreating community helps to empower people to overcome passivity; educational reform helps to change the inadequate educational system, raise awareness on the so far lacking interconnectedness and help to acquire new skills.

The core themes of the cases are: conscious awareness as the new paradigm, simpler responsible life, establishing peace culture and simpler reconnected life. The core themes reflect the different characters of the cases with Lilleoru stressing the cultural/worldview aspect, Sieben Linden the ecological and economic aspects, Tamera the social aspect and GEN-E attempting to cover as many aspects as possible. What is the common denominator of these themes? Considering the core categories and themes, the main problem across the cases and the comparative analysis at the beginning of this subchapter, the core solution of the ecovillage cases is reconnecting. Reconnecting to a new culture, to a simpler and more responsible way of life, to the community of other people and life, and to a new type of openness for learning and awareness change.

To tackle the main issue of disconnection and help to change the destructive, unequal and wasteful consumer society resting and reproducing the worldview of separation, the shared ecovillage solution is to foster reconnecting. This requires reconnecting to oneself and the community of life to make a paradigm change and create a new culture supporting reviving community and living a simpler and more responsible lives. To foster these transformations, educational reform is considered necessary.

## 4.1.2. Transition case studies

### 4.1.2.1. Paide case study

**Problems.** The central problem motivating the initiative in Paide was the experience of discontent with living in an unsustainable system – the capitalist project-based consumer society dictating that development requires economic growth and expansion and the value of everything has to be measured and monetized. The experience of discontentment with the dominating way of life led the initiators to ask for alternatives and seek for ways to exit this system, as they felt that there must be a much nicer way to live.

The way of life possible in the structures of this unsustainable system was believed to dismantle community. People often have to drive to bigger centres to work, which means that they are often tired and overwhelmed, once they get back home and prefer to withdraw. Thus, it has become common that people don´t know their neighbours much and live relatively isolated lives. Furthermore, people have often lost touch not only with each other, but also with the place they live in. This has created certain rootlessness – people often come home only for overnight stays, not knowing what happens around them. They also lack time to be interested in their local heritage and history.

The consumer society is making people convenient, perhaps even complacent. The convenience of buying everything from food to services has made them dependent of the system. People find it difficult to exit the system even if they wanted to because by falling out of the system they would face a number of difficulties. Although they would probably have more time for themselves and the others, they would probably have less money, which would mean that their quality of life would drastically fall. This is because most people lack many practical skills that would grant them more autonomy in everyday life as they would be able to do things themselves. Such skills as making or repairing their own clothes, building or renovating their homes or growing and cooking their own food, which were normal in Estonian society three-four generations ago, have been disappearing in the capitalist Estonia.

Also, the nominal and often superficial nature of participatory processes on the local municipal level was considered problematic. Such "*let them participate, but in a way that would not disturb us*" attitude was described by initiative members as "*bureaucracy killing freedom and creativity*" (EP, male, 40s). The experience was that in many instances people are heard, but not listened to, which has made it difficult to get real acceptance or consideration.

**Solutions for more sustainable development: core theme and concepts**

The Transition model was welcomed by the Paide initiative as an approach offering a way for **relocalising to exit the unsustainable system** because it fitted the local needs. The comprehensive nature, emphasis on relocalisation, resilience, reskilling, sparing use of resources, and autonomy, all fitting very well with the direction chosen by the Paide initiative, were appreciated:

> *"What the Transition model suggests just seemed so similar to what we had been thinking and doing here. We are also trying to teach people some practical skills which have been forgotten. But, at the same time, there were many new ideas that inspired"* (EP, male, 40s).

Achieving the goal of relocalising to exit the system requires building up the courage to leave the system that does not seem sustainable and meaningful any more, and seek for a viable alternative. It is believed that many people are afraid to leave the system and don't do what they think is right because they are afraid that leaving would mean a radical decline in their quality of life:

> *"The goal is exiting the system, meaning that it is possible to live well if you don´t work in Tallinn or Tartu and don´t own a house with a mortgage. That perhaps you live with less money, but not a poorer life, because you can do many things yourself, you have resources right beside you and your neighbours that you know well, who help you when needed"* (EP, male, 40s).

The prefix "re" in relocalising refers to becoming increasingly less dependent on big unsustainable systems by restoring the connection to the surrounding place and people which had been cut by the globalised economic system. It is believed that makes life simpler and more resilient. For exiting the system and moving towards more sustainable development, the Paide initiative suggests relocalising one's life by supporting local economy, reconnecting to local nature, cultural heritage and community and reskilling to relearn forgotten practical skills. The initiator of the Paide initiative felt unhappy with being part of the unsustainable system that did not fulfil him any more. When faced with a choice between his regular job as a lawyer and his hobby of making a difference, the initiator chose to leave his daily job, making the leap into the unknown. Since then he has had time to dedicate himself to activities which he has considered meaningful, learn many new things and find new sources of income. Despite having less financial means, he has experienced better quality of than before.

**Relocalisation.** The sustainable development approach of the Paide initiative has its roots on the one hand in understanding one´s origins in terms reconnecting to local history and heritage, and on the other hand in visioning a localised, lively and empowered way of life, resilient and autonomous enough to withstand problems in the societal macrosystems. Reconnecting refers to restoring, reviving or recreating something which has been lost, like a connection to the local community, cultural heritage, the neighbourhood or skill in order to reconnect to local life. This means relearning to know and respect the local context, environment and community. This strengthens the identity and builds a solid basis for understanding local needs, potentials, and shortcomings:

> *"I think it makes sense to start with environmental protection or heritage protection. This means that you start to be more deeply involved and interested in your environment. How it developed and why and which are the valuable parts needing protection. I think that such roots are relevant for urban communities because this ensures that we don´t import outside models without knowing what*

*is locally relevant. So you can take good practices and ideas from different models but build up something which makes sense locally and fits the needs and character"* (EP, male, 40s).

Starting a garden or a small business were seen as relevant steps towards relocalising and becoming more independent. Also encouraging people to start to use the gardens again for farming or gardening instead of going to the supermarkets was seen as a means to enliven the town. Relocalisation also involves living more in the real world and less in the virtual world, for example by engaging actively in local cultural life. As people find more to do and experience locally, the need to travel diminishes, they support local businesses and services, so much energy is spared and pollution undone. This is how relocalisation is believed to contribute to energy decent.

To support local economy and express gratitude to volunteers for their substantial effort and help at the local volunteer centre, the initiative started circulating local currency P.A.I.[15] The currency offered a possibility to provide those people services, that they needed, but sometimes lacked funds for. At the time of research, it was primarily possible to use the currency in the community building to rent bicycles, buy old building materials for renovation, or to participate in courses and culture events like exhibitions or concerts. There were temporary cooperation attempts with the local cinema or hardware store. Everybody seemed to like the idea, but nobody felt up to being the first to support it on a regular basis. It was believed that if the local government would start accepting P.A.I., the process would be accelerated. It proved difficult to get the officials into the boat although the holders of the currency were clearly people who were significantly contributing to local wellbeing, saving the town also money by doing things on a voluntary basis. By the time of research, the municipality was not convinced. Also negotiations with businesses were progressing slowly, which was considered surprising, because from the initiative´s perspective it was again seen as a win-win situation. Every business offers discounts from time to time so instead of offering it to everybody, it could be offered to people that have P.A.I.-s and the business could get good PR, showing that they care for the local volunteers. Lacking time and human resources for lobbying were seen as the reason for the slow progress on both fronts.

**Reconnecting** to the local life progressed in Paide from raking responsibility for the situation by teaching/learning sustainable renovation to fostering community revival. Despite starting with renovation, the group never intended to make the old town into a museum with pretty houses; instead, they wished it to be lively as it was in the old days. Teaching sustainable renovation led to jointly renovating the building granted by the town with volunteers, creating a public space which later developed into a community centre. It is believed that relocalisation lends a sense of belonging and security, considered crucial for experiencing sustainable wellbeing:

*"The society cannot function independently when people cannot manage. I think that we don´t need to buy many things, that we can get them in another way – by doing them ourselves or getting them from our neighbours. This binds people with their location in a different way; the place wins from this connection, and I think that the person also feels more secure"* (EP, male, 40s).

The willingness to take responsibility meant seeking partnerships and initiating cooperations with different groups to develop positive alternatives despite setbacks. Opening and running the local branch of the Information Centre for Sustainable Renovation (ICSR) is the first example of successful cooperation with multiple actors. Jointly working on renovation the building, granted by the city, brought together people who had had little prior contact. The readiness for doing something for the common good distinguished the people that became the core group for re-establishing community in Paide. The centre brought relevant knowhow on how to renovate old houses in a sustainable and

[15] Estonian acronym for "instrument for developing Paide", see subchapter 3.3.1.2.1. for more details.

respectful manner, and also provided a basis for educational activities in cooperation of the local employment agency, as discussed below under reskilling. So, voluntary cooperation and reskilling were important community-buidling tools in Paide. Cooperation with the local government functioned well in some instances and less well in others. From the positive side, the municipality granted the buildings that the initiative uses for the centre and also provides some finances yearly. They accepted the EDAP inspired co-created vision of the development of the old town as part of the town development plan in 2004 (up to 2020), giving the initiative a sense of sequrity in terms of the overall development direction. Hoever, there were also difficulties in engaging the municipality. As mentioned earlier, one difficulty had to do with the local currency P.A.I. In many instances, the initiative members have had the experience of being heard, but not listened to, as it has been difficult to get real acceptance and consideration for their initiatives. This *let them participate, but in a way that would not disturb us* attitude was not considered open or participative by initiative members. Cooperating with actors from the civil society scene was considered much easier. For example to foster exchange of experiences the initiative has organised the Old Town Conference inviting towns with similar problems to Paide for a number of years. In fact, information about the Transition movement was received through cooperation and experience exchange across initiatives: while participating in the GEN-Estonia summer gathering the initiator of the Paide initiative met Toomas Trapido from the LDI and ecovillage movements who told him about Transtition which inspired him.

**Restoring autonomy** for exiting the unsustainable system and reskilling to be able to live more self-sufficiently were the long-term aims of the movement. Realising this requires openness for change and lifelong learning. According to Paide approach to sustainable development, restoring autnomy requires that people are open to reskilling – relearning skills that make them more independent in their daily lives from the big consumption chains so that instead of buying more they can create and exchange more among themselves locally using up fewer resources (e.g. transport). Greater independence and self-sufficiency, in turn, make exiting the unsustainable system easier. In this way, good life can be achieved with less money, competition and wasteful consumption, while winning in terms of skills, relationships and quality of life and causing significantly less damage to the ecosystem.

Reskilling involves relearning forgotten abilities that existed a generation or more ago, but which have started to disappear as the consumer society started to spread in Estonia since early 1992, was one of the goals set by the initiative since the beginning. Such skills include building and renovating, gardening to grow one´s own food, making jams and preserves from fruit and vegetables, cooking and backing, repairing and upcycling clothes, home textiles, shoes or furniture etc. It does not mean that everybody needs to learn everything, as in a community people can help each other and offer each other services and products. The wish to engage in reskilling in Paide was motivated by practical need of whitecollars to equip themselves with skills and abilities to live well also after stepping out of the system. To support developing autonomy, the initiative has opened a wood workshop that people can use when they need to repair or build something.

Reskilling has been experienced as a powerful educational tool that can empower people. For example in cooperation with the local employment agency the community centre has offered regular training and intership options in the field of sustainable renovation. This way reskilling has led to reintegration of many unemployed people by giving them new qualifications and new chances on the job market.

The central solutions for transitioning to a more sustainable future according to Paide case are listed in the table below.

**Table 17. The core theme and categories of the Paide case study.**

| Relocalising to exit the system | | |
|---|---|---|
| **(Re)localisation** | **Reconnecting** | **Restoring autonomy** |
| Systems change | Community revival | Openness to change |
| Energy decent | Taking responsibility | Lifelong leaning |
| Supporting local economy | Cooperation | Reskilling |

Relocalising to exit the system emerged as the core theme and central solution for moving towards a more sustainable way of life. The core categories (re)localisation, reconnecting and restoring autonomy serve as the main activities needed to achieve this solution.

### 4.1.2.2. Freiburg case study

**Problems.** Resource depletion issues, including peak oil, and waste issues causing climate change were seen as central challenges that need to be tackled in order to find solutions.

Another problem on the societal level was that people have serious difficulties understanding complex sustainability issues: "*When you can't see the connections between different things, then you cannot understand the problem. Especially on the environmental subject, because lots of environmental problems are also on the global scale, making them almost too complex to understand"* (AF, male, 50s). Despite not really understanding the situation and the systems, people try to make bold changes to natural systems. So the main problem causing the crisis is believed to be caused by anthropocentric attempts to subject nature to human will and thereby harming the functioning of the interconnected natural systems without knowing the full consequences of human interference.

The next problem was that people don't understand each other when trying to tackle these issues, causing misunderstandings. The systematic focus on specialisation has resulted in producing too few people with a broader perspective, which hinders change. An example here is the failure to cooperate on the governance level. The Agenda 21 process in Germany was mentioned as an example of failed cooperation between citizens and municipalities:

> *"There were lots of people with good ideas who wanted to do things, including me in the 1990s, but in the end, the administration did not allow them to do it. Finally, the initiative just didn't go anywhere, people became frustrated, and stopped coming… the whole thing just died down. And if it was carried on by the administration, it was purely... a formal process"* (AF, male, 50s).

The reason for this failure was seen to lie in the nature of municipal structures – they are good for administrating, but unsuitable for acting out, being innovative or supporting initiatives like Transition because their unhurried pace and many rules slow down the processes to the degree that demotivates volunteers. The national governments were also considered too inert and inefficient for sufficiently tackling complex global problems. Here the example of climate negotiations was brought which have brought about much talk, but much less practical changes and solutions. In addition, the governance level is considered too far from the people, engaging in abstract planning, unable to understand the actual processes. Furthermore, was believed that politics and technology were not enough to make the needed changes happen (TTFreiburg 2011). It was sugested that working with concepts and systems that caused the problems, as the governance level does, delivers extremely limited practical results. For example, green consumption was not regarded sufficient as a solution on its own. It was concluded that solutions have to come from alternative sources – bottom up, not top down.

**Solutions for more sustainable development: core theme and categories**

Taking responsibility for change emerged as the core theme of this case. This includes willingness to take both individual as well as collective responsibility and work towards achieving a systems change, establishing a positive vision for the future and relocalising to increae autonomy.

**Systems change** was considered unavoidably necessary. The need to develop an understanding that we are facing complex and multi-dimensional systematic problems, which require systemic solutions, was considered the main precondition for solving sustainability problems. Developing a broader understanding of complex sustainability issues was considered highly relevant to help people understand the urgency of change and support systems change. It was emphasised that more attention need to be paid to interconnections between processes:

> *"People tend to think sectorally. I always resisted that. I always looked for how is the box of waste management linked to the box of landscape management, how is the box of urban sustainability linked to the box of rural sustainability. So I was always more interested in seeing what are the connections between the boxes than the boxes themselves"* (AF, male, 50s).

So a broader, more holistic outlook on sustainability issues was considered a precondition for substantial changes towards sustainability. Indeed, the Transition approach has been shaped by the holistic perspective offered by permaculture and is often divided into three levels of action: the head (trainings and info events), the heart (group and community building, networking), and hands (Open Space, World Cafe and individual thematic projects) (TTFreiburg 2011).

As respect for natural systems seems to have been lost, building it up again was considered relevant. In this sense the Brundtland definition was considered a kind of lowest common denominator. However, the ecological pillar is considered central as the primary consideration:

> *"We need to get the centre right before we can focus on the periphery. If the centre does not work, the social and economic dimension becomes irrelevant. As we are not managing our ecological sustainability, we have now the problem with climate change and with land use. If you constantly use up bio-capacity and overstretch the carrying capacity of the whole system, as we do right now, then at some point we cannot sustain ourselves"* (AF, male, 50s).

So the relevance of staying within the ecological limits is emphasised as the other dimensions depend on nature as a basis. It is argued that sustainability is learning to know and imitating how the world works to seamlessly and intellignelty integrate new systems into the existing one as part of it:

> *"Basically sustainability is imitating how the world works. Which means that you have to know the system, understand it and then work within that system. … We are kind of a subsystem of nature. What we are doing at the moment is just the other way around. Subjecting nature as a subsystem to our anthropocentric system. Of course that doesn't work, because what we are building is not based on fundamental laws of ecology. And that's why we run into problems"* (AF, male, 50s).

Having a **positive vision** was considered very relevant to motivate people and bring them together. It was suggested that positive visions empower (TTFreiburg 2011). The initiator admitted that more shared visioning would be useful for the group as: *"Having a vision is important, as many people can get a lot of power from this vision if it's positive."* (HF, male, 19). So positive solutions and good examples that were offered at the training had encouraged people to attend. Visioning is one of the tools used in the Transition movement for strengthening commitment and common ground in the groups, for that community visioning or shared visioning techniques by John Croft (dragon dreaming) and Joanna Macy (deep ecology, Work that Reconnects exercises) were widely used. Transition model was considered relevant as it has both positive vision as well as many practical solutions. It was firmly believed that introducing best practices works better than sharing scary visions of *"gloom and doom"*.

Transitioning was considered the most relevant journey of our time that leads to a more peaceful, resilient and sustainable world where communities are strengthened, and resilience and stability against crises are increased. At the Training for Transition course I attended in Freiburg during the fieldwork phase I met many people across southern Germany and Switzerland who were looking for alternatives, while at the same time being intimidated by negative future visions. Several people attending said that most movies made on the crisis, including "The End of Suburbia" (Greene 2004) which changed TN founder Rob Hopkins's life and motivated the creation of TN, are too negative and depress rather than inspire them.

Raising awareness was considered crucial to engage people in working towards relising the positive vision. For that regular public events were organised to attract attention. The regular monthly information evenings about Transition Town or film evenings for raising awareness on problematic issues, as well as meetings of working groups on different topics made it possible for people with different interests to enter the movement, participate and initiate new projects. Education also plays a relevant role in awareness raising, especially the Training for Transition courses and permaculture courses. In the Freiburg Transition initiative the "heart and soul" working group was (re)starting to tackle transition topics that can be described as socio-cultural and personal, and facilitate sharing.

Sharing was regarded as a helpful way to reconnect and be empowered. It was regularly done in working groups as well as during public events, such as discussion rounds following film screenings. Communicating and sharing were deemed important for a well-functioning Transition initiative. To enable open sharing, a lot of group-work in an open, friendly and informal atmosphere was used to facilitate overcoming barriers. In the bigger team gatherings methods such as Open Space and WorldCafé were used to collect ideas and ensure openness.

In terms of cooperation, it was believed that cooperation in team was facilitated by a common understanding of the complexity of the problems. Though the group did not reflect much on is sustainable and what not, they believed that they had a common ground. There was openness for such a discussion, just the time seemed to be lacking. In terms of external cooperation, establishing new and using existing networks and cooperation partners was considered an asset in awareness raising work. In Freiburg especially the Waldorf schools, members of the permaculture, deep ecology and ecovillage movements had been of great help. Such cooperations mainly run on the personal level and are based on shared values. For example, also the initiator of the Freiburg initiative was introduced to the movement by his teacher at a Waldorf school and the regular film evenings took place in another Waldorf school in Freiburg. Cooperation also takes place with the ecovillage movement, in particular an ecovillage which a group of people were planning to create near Freiburg at the time of research. For example, people from this ecovillage group participated in Training for Transition course and people from Transition movement participated in a dragon dreaming session the others hosted. One of the core group members of the Transition initiative is doing his voluntary service in the ecovillage group. Also planning a joint workshop on Transition and ecovillages as existing examples of social innovation was on-going during the research period. So a solid common ground between these groups was experienced:

> *"I think that there is a common idea under ecovillages and transition towns, that transition people make in the town and ecovillage people in the countryside... There is the understanding of the necessity of change. And there is also the positive vision in both and doing something practical. I think ecovillages are more practical when they are existing. Transition needs more time for changing something. You have to do a lot of awareness raising first"* (HF, male, 19).

The Transition initiative in Freiburg also participated in the city-wide platform joining initiatives working for urban transformation.

**Taking responsibility** emerged as the third core category of this case. A saying "Mutbürger statt Wutbürger" (courageous citizen instead of angry citizen) was popular at the time of fieldwork, encouraging people that instead of just being frustrated and angry about all the things that are not well, people should take the courage and be responsible for their lifes and actions, making a difference themselves. Taking responsibility both on the personal as well as the communal level was considered part of the Transition appeal.

The transitioners in Freiburg were not hoping for solutions from technology or from politics as they did not believe that resource and climate problems can be solved with force and the many agreements and conferences had brought very limited results. Instead, they stressed the relevance of empowering the civil society and valuing the contribution of each person: "*We need experts and politicians, but the citizens themselves have considerable potential of untapped creative power and their own visions"* (TTFreiburg 2011). The members recognise the benefits of support from the governance side, but having learned from the failed cooperation attempts, transition was considered a valuable and autonomous chance to make a difference.

Rather than aiming for making a difference on the European or national level, starting on the local level was seen as a reasonable way to make changes: *"This is why we need this type of bottom-up movements. Because at the end of the day, each place has to decide for its own, according to its abilities, how it can move from the past of unsustainable action to sustainable action"* (AF, male, 50s). **Autonomy** is seen as a guarantee that decision-making can be fast, not depending on long bureaucratic processes. The benefits of being independent, flexible and locally rooted added to the bearing of the grassroots movements as stakeholders that can make changes happen on the local level:

> *"You can do stuff, like for example develop policies, high level strategies on national or regional level, but enactment is always on the local level. So to actually not just talk about things, but also do things, there is no other way than to work on the local level. I think that it's also why the bottom-up movements are the key for success to become a more sustainable society"* (AF, male, 50s).

**Inner and outer change were considered as interrelated aspects.** There was an inner transition group, known as "heart and soul" group active in Freiburg at the time of research. It was believed that inner and outer changes have to be both tackled in order to achieve the needed changes. Whereas in the case of outer thransition people met e.g. in the community garden, then in the case of inner transition the idea was to take special time to share the fears and uncertainties that people feel in the face of the many problems and lacking sustainability, but also positive experiences, hopes and visions. Experience showed that such sharing was encouraging and empowering for participants, facilitating taking responsibility. The central solutions according to the Freiburg case study are listed in the table below.

**Table 18. The core theme and categories of the Freiburg case study.**

| **Taking responsibility for change** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Systems change** | **Positive vision** | **Taking responsibility** |
| Respect for nature | Awareness raising | Autonomy |
| Understanding the urgency | Communicating | Relocalising |
| Holistic perspective | Cooperating | Inner and outer change |

Taking responsibility for change emerged as as the core theme and solutions to their main concerns for moving towards sustainable development. Solutions to the crisis included systems change facilitating understanding and facing complex systemic problems that require systemic solutions, developing and offering positive visions and practical solutions to taking responsibility and increasing autonomy.

### 4.1.2.3. Telheiras case study

**Problems.** Losing touch emerged as the main problem of this case. The initiators noticed that people had ceased to spend time in their neighbourhoods, not knowing their neighbours any more, preferring to spend time elsewhere than in the district:

> *"I'm 24, and I'm worried about how things are going. … I really worry about our community. I'm worried that we are losing touch. Not only in our heads, but especially between people. And we don't really know how to interact anymore. I'm sad to think that some friends of mine need alcohol to feel comfortable enough to speak to strangers or to someone, they would really like to know... that's kind of scary"* (RT, male, 20s).

Losing touch was related to people working in other parts of the city, spending their free time elsewhere, and younger people often spending their free time in virtual reality. It was also related to urbanisation, which was perceived as a big problem in Portugal. Many people were leaving towns and villages for cities in search of a better life and had difficulties establishing new relationships, which can lead to social isolation.

A related problem was that as people spend less time in their neighbourhood, cars have taken over the space. The amount of cars is ever increasing. As a result, people have ceased to feel safe and comfortable on the streets:

> *"The parents are afraid to let the kids go to the streets. That's like a vicious circle – people are afraid and don't go on the streets, so they don't talk to each other. The more insecure they are about going to the streets, the more likely it is that they stay at home. When they go out, they go by car. We want to change that for safety, for the livelihood of the neighbourhood, for everything"* (LT, male, 20s).

As more children grow up in the virtual reality instead of the streets of their district and people moving to city struggle with building up new social networks, people lack the security of belonging to a community and a sense of being in touch with the place and the surrounding people.

Having lost touch facilitated not taking responsibility. Not taking responsibility for making change and good ideas happen and expecting somebody else to do it for them was perceived as another serious problem:

> *"People with ideas and no time cannot impose their ideas on us. We support, but people need to do their projects themselves. That's a thing that we experience a lot here. Lots of people come tell us how things should be done. We are like: "Very well, what are you going to do?" and they say: "Aa, I don't know, I don't have time." Well, we cannot do it for you!"* (LT, male, 20s).

Such passive attitude was described as consumer mentality. It meant also that the initiative had a lack of time and manpower, threatening the proactive volunteers with burnout. Another problem was that when people are not interested in participation, most decisions about their future are made without their consent. This, in turn, continues to alienate people further.

**Solutions for moving towards sustainable development**

**Reviving urban community** proved to be the core theme of the Telheiras initiative. To counteract the biggest problems – losing touch and not taking responsibility – this revival involves having a shared positive vision, reconnecting to each other, reality (when needed), and place; and taking responsibility and participating in the processes.

**A positive vision** was believed to empower. It is easier to engage people who know each other and have a shared vision of good life. The positive vision of sustainable Telheiras district in Lisbon was a vision of a livelier, empowered and reconnected life: a district, where people are not isolated or alienated, but in touch with each other and the place. There would be more shared spaces and events, bringing people together and putting them back on the streets. The public spaces would be used as

meeting, learning and leisure places, e.g. for weekend street festivals, organic food markets, urban gardening or reskilling workshops. The streets would be as much for pedestrians and cyclists as cars, so people would feel secure and enjoy coming out of their apartments to meet others. People would have to travel less because relevant services and working places are located in their district. They have gotten to know nice people in their neighbourhood, so they spend more time in their district. Less transport means less pollution. There would be more awareness on the benefits of sharing. The broad neighbourhood community would take responsibility by changing their own behaviour and actively participate in shaping the future of their district, e.g. by creating an energy decent action plan (EDAP).

**Awareness raising** about positive alternatives is relevant for creating a common ground. For involving local people and raising their awareness of the alternatives, a variety of different events and trainings are organised by the transition initiative. Acitivites helping to spread the positive vision include different types of activities in different settings, to appeal to different types of people. For example open discussions in the public library are convenient to visit as they do not require preparation or active participation. There is no entrance fee, and the group doesn´t have to pay for the room. Topics range from urban mobility to renewable energy sources and post-carbon society. Also the film screenings are convenient to participate. Such events with make it easier to get to know likeminded people. For people interested in specific topics, there are focus groups with different regular meeting times and DIY reskilling workshops to develop capacities and skills. For example, the "No plastic" group organised a workshop on sewing with people from all ages making textile bags to use for shopping.

**Empowering participation.** Building upon communication, which has built trust and enabled cooperation, individuals are empowered and their participation in the broader processes is facilitated. The state of being empowered can also be described as proactive and hands on, or "the power of just doing stuff" as Rob Hopkins of Transition network put it (Hopkins 2013). The activists of the Telheiras group noticed that long planning discussions tended to lead to conflicts, whereas doing things together had the opposite effect of creating a common ground. The group was empowered by participation in the transition process and saw that they had the power to empower others as well: *"We know that lots of initiatives are inspired by ours from people from other initiatives. This is a paradox: we always struggle with not having enough people and not being very organised, but we do stuff, the others are inspired and want to do something similar. So we encourage."* (LT, male, 20s).

**For reconnecting, recreating community** is considered the first step on the transition path. The aim is to empower people to reconnect to other people and places in their districts to recreate livelier neighbourhoods by fostering the sense of belonging, wellbeing, trust and safety. Bringing people together again in meeting places and streets of the district has been the aim of the initiative since it started in 2007. This is done by creating spaces and opportunities for the people to meet and communicate to spend time in their neighbourhoods instead of the city. The wish for more community was the motivating power behind the whole Telheiras initiative: *"So it is a pretty social feeling that we want more community stuff here. We want to have more community and have more shared spaces and time. And also more lively streets in our daily lives, and more party on the streets"* (FT, male, 20s). Recreating community involves relocalising, creating shared spaces and fostering communication.

**Relocalising** means that relevant functions, including services, working places and leisure activities, are brought back to the district. One of the problems is that people have lost contact to local people and their neighbourhood as a place, because their relevant social relationships, workplaces and services are located elswhere. Consequently, they need to be pretty mobile to meet their needs, leaving little time for their home district. Spending more time in the district increases the chances of more communication and cooperation. The initiative aims to reconnect people and establish more

community, shaed spaces and activities in their home district, it can be considered a Yes in My Back Yard (YIMBY) movement[16].

To foster district level community, creating more **shared spaces** as meeting places in the district were deemed necessary. Diverse events were organised in different settings, ranging from thre streets to the public library to engage locals with different interests. The community garden functioned as a meeting place for people with a green thumb and as an educational site for a broader spectrum of people. Recreating a lively neighbourhood as the initiators remembered from their childhood also included the plan for repopulating the streets. For that, they wished to reduce the noise level and speed of the cars make the streets comfortable and safe for the people again.

> *"... we don't feel comfortable with not being allowed to be on the streets, … because there is too much noise or movement or automobile traffic. As we grew up, we played a lot on the streets, we were always on the streets, we grew on the streets. … Now people go less to the streets. People who are walking feel like the public space belongs to the cars. Cars are important, but they need to be integrated with everything, they shouldn´t make the rules"* (FT, male, 20s).

**Fostering communication** is necessary for recreating community. Recreating community involves finding a community of like-minded people as a support net as well as feeling in community with people with different interests who help to enliven local life. Creating shared spaces and relocalising relevant functions create good conditions that foster communication between local inhabitants. Good communication, in turn, fosters cooperation and trust-building, relevant for community-building.

In terms of fostering communication with a wider community of likeminded people, the Telheiras initiative is well connected. The lively online community *Permaculture and Transition* with nearly 3000 members across Portugal in the social media channel NING has introduced Transition to many people in Portugal. Because of common roots and similar principles, the people in these movements often overlap and support each other. There are many face to face meetings between Transition groups and the other Lisbon transition groups also visit the events of Transition Telheiras. There are also lively email conversations and a Google Group for Transition activists to learn from each other and exchange experiences.

Beyond communication with local inhabitants, other Transition initiatives and permaculture practitioners also cooperation with local municipality was considered relevant. Urban gardening and mobility projects serve as examples here. The first attempt to create a community garden in Telheiras failed about 15 years ago, as the decision to build the metro on the same spot was made. This left many people disappointed, so the Transition group had reopened the dialogue for getting a plot of land from the district municipality with *mutual interest in involving schools.* Another cooperation example was related to the plan of revibing the streets. As increased traffic hinders the lively use of the streets by pedestrians and cyclists, the group initiated a project to change traffic flows in the neighbourhood. They were in a dialogue with the head of the planning department, aiming to reduce the maximum speed of cars from 50 to 30 km/h in the neighbourhood to increase safety.

Having a positive vision and a group of likeminded people empowers and makes it easier to **take responsibility**. It is considered relevant that people would participate in making decisions that shape the future of their district. The Transition model supportive of **local autonomy** is considered empowering. Being empowered is considered a relevant step towards taking responsibility: *"With transition movement we can have our future in our hands, this is something we can do... such movements have to be neighbourhood movements and not depend on certain people and their power*

[16] YIMBY signifies a type of social movement open to some changes in their neighborhood.

*that much"* (LT, male, 20s). The empowered inhabitants can decide the relevant questions amongst themselves: *"I envision a future in Telheiras where people decide. That the decision-making processes would be more localised"* (RT, male, 20s). In accordance with their wish not to depend on any persons or institutions (aside from ART) they had received no external funding[17]. Community funding (crowd-funding) was considered the only option they might consider. In the future the group dreams of doing an Energy Descent Action Plan (EDAP) for Telheiras, which was one of the first things that inspired them about Transition: *"A vision for the future and build it with all our partners, with schools, commerce, everything"* (RT, male, 20s). The group sees that for completing the EDAP, they need to provide resources from their side, but also require a critical mass of people. The current phase they saw as a phase where they prepare people for it, discussing things.

Taking responsibility involves **value change** that would support realising the positive vision. Sharing is a good example here. The interviewees pointed out that in Portugal individualisation has led to the situation where there is no habit of sharing. Sharing apartments, cars and washing machines, which is considered normal in some other European countries like Germany, is not considered normal in Portugal. Seeing sharing a sign of poverty is part of the consumerist *newer and more is better* value judgement. Such a cultural stance hinders the spread of resource saving practices like sharing, as they are stigmatised. Through awareness raising by organising info events, discussions, film screening and reskilling workshops, and making sharing public spaces popular again, attempts are made to counteract this tance and offer empowering alternatives.

The central solutions for moving towards more sustainable development according to the Telheiras case are listed in the table below.

**Table 19. The core theme and categories of Telheiras case study.**

| Reviving urban community | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Positive vision** | **Reconnecting** | **Taking responsibility** |
| Awareness raising | Relocalising | Restoring local autonomy |
| Empowering participation | Sharing | Value change |

Reviving urban community proved to be the core theme and central solution of the Telheiras initiative. To counteract the biggest problems – losing touch and not taking responsibility – this revival involves having a shared positive vision, reconnecting to each other, reality (when needed), and place; and taking responsibility for participating in the processes.

### 4.1.2.4. Transition network case study

**Problems.** The age of cheap energy has made the globalised consumer society possible through cheap production and retail of consumer goods and cheap transport of people and goods across the world. Although this has increased the quality of life for many in the short run, allowing more people the freedom to consume and own more, in the long run the age of oil dependency heavily pollutes the environment and contributes to climate change. Transition network maintained that the two toughest challenges facing humankind at the start of the 21st century are climate change and peak oil. Whereas the first is well documented and visible in the media, the peak oil issues have received less attention and are often questioned. The general lack of understanding of the interrelations of these issues is considered the central problem causing unsustainability. Furthermore, living in the age of cheap energy has made people passive and dependent on the system so they don't see alternatives.

[17] With two exceptions: the sewing workshop materials, and a lottery during one library event.

A further problem is that it is believed that due to peaking of the fossil fuels humanity has to transition to a lower energy future, but the preparations are not made, which is considered "short-sighted" (Trannsition network 2012a). It is believed far better to ride that wave and look for solutions now than be faced with energy shortage and high prices with no proper preparations and alternatives in place. The existing efforts to find alternatives to fossil fuels and prepare a soft landing for the coming period from local, national and international governance levels are considered lacking or fragmented at best – at any rate insufficient for addressing the urgency of these issues. The many conferences and meetings making politicians and officials fly across the globe from Brussels to Rio to Doha to Johannesburg have brought minimal practical results aside from nice rhetoric. Consequently, there was little trust in the governmental level.

The reason for the lacking preparations and progress is considered to be that the governance level across the EU tends to consider the current standard of living non-negotiable, which in turn makes economic growth non-negotiable: "*Our leaders, when designing for our future, assume there will always be cheap energy, economic growth, growth in car use and so on – all of which are highly questionable assumptions."* (Transition network 2012a).

A directly related problem was that the governmental level seemed to believe that the technological innovations will solve the problems that we are currently facing including pollution and resource depletion. TN members see that technological advance does not offer the necessary "miracle" solutions the governance structures seem to be hoping for. Technological progress is considered helpful on many fronts, but not sufficient to solve the crisis as such, as the technological innovations do not change the growth-oriented mindset, its dire consequences and the natural limits to growth.

Considering this lack of alternatives, it was argued that there is a lack of a positive vision in our culture (in the cultures of the western world), resulting in cultivating monocultures, competition and indulging in overconsumption, aggravating pollution, climate change, and generating fear for change instead of providing practical empowering solutions.

**Solutions for more sustainable development: core theme and concepts**

**Energy descent** encompasses (re)localisation, simpler life, degrowth, and self-reliance as its main properties. Climate change and peak oil have been the central motivators for the TN to envision transition as a way of achieving energy descent. The need to decarbonize, to break the current addiction to oil that underlies all aspects of Western life from food and housing to transport, is seen as an incredibly urgent challenge in the Transition network. The best way for tackling it is inclusive, making it a robust community-created and -led change. **(Re)localisation**, **simpler life, degrowth and self-reliance are seen as** the keys to achieving energy descent and tackle the challenges of climate change and peak oil. The strived-to low-energy future involves increased, not decreased wellbeing, openness, inclusive and equal co-creation in the context of (re)localisation. (Re)localisation can be achieved through adopting a simpler, less energy-intensive way of life. It is believed that relocalisation will result in *"a life that is more fulfilling, more socially connected and more equitable"* (Brangwyn and Hopkins 2008: 3). Relocalisation is inextricably linked with alternative economic ideas related to degrowth. In a nutshell, the idea is to create an economy that serves the local people instead of big corporations in far-away places. This includes using local currency, different ways of investment and building homes, and also re-localising energy use and food circles. Local producers create local jobs, helping to decrease unreasonable energy use for transport. The money stays in the community, benefitting all local stakeholders and allowing more prosperity to accumulate locally. The Totnes pound circulating since 2007 is a good example of a successful local complementary currency with 150 local businesses accepting it in 2014 in paper and electronic form. The transition approach to investing advocates for internal investment, unlocking the social capital and goodwill of the people by

investing in one's community. This includes using crowdfunding and so-called patient capital instead of venture capital. In such a way the transition economy seeks to support the enterprising spirit and emergence of entrepreneurial culture, seeking win-win models based on supporting local networks, communities and cooperation. Also adopting a **simpler way of life and increasing self-reliance** are seen as necessary parts of energy decent. Simpler life means downscaling consumption, transportation needs and localising the lifestyle. It also includes increasing the ability to be self-reliant by creating closer community ties and reskilling. Facilitating reskilling means creating conditions for learning anew practical skills often forgotten. Reskilling enables making many things without paying for it, which helps to become less dependent on money. Self-reliance also empowers as it increases the ability to make the unavoidable change happen: people are better prepared for becoming active and making energy decent happen. The relative passivity of the governance level calls for action from the side of citizens. Taking responsibility is a relevant part in being or becoming self-reliant. People using the transition model have no doubt that a radical change will happen and it is considered relevant to prepare for it in time, instead of waiting for the governance structures to do something. Indeed, there is no doubt among TN members that the politics and technological advance do not offer the necessary "miracle" solutions; instead, people have to become active themselves to make a difference. The sustainability challenge is therefore the responsibility of everyone – all have to prepare for going through the next great energy transition. Self-reliance carries the active and practical spirit of the movement, the power of doing stuff (Hopkins 2013) by leading by example, learning along the way and trusting collective wisdom.

**Fostering resilient communities** is the second core category of the TN case. Having a local focus means starting with the local community rather than trying to save the whole country, region, or the whole world. What is needed for fostering resilient communities? Openness and respecting diversity, cooperation and trust in collective intelligence. Openness means i**nclusion** of all interested people regardless of their background and social status. The transition model is open, described as one snapshot of an emerging model and people are encouraged not to get stuck to any particular one, but keep on developing it. Such openness has to do with perpaculture, an influential teaching in the TN, where d**iversity** is considered the basis for resilient systems. Similarly to natural systems, it is believed that difference makes systems stronger and more viable, so it is fostered. Inclusiveness and diversity are seen to raise the resilience of a community as such community joins people with different qualities and skills, making the community more self-sufficient. For example, honouring the elders fosters social coherence and transfer of experiences and knowledge. A resilient community is defined as "*a community that is self-reliant for the greatest possible number of its needs"* (Brangwyn and Hopkins 2008: 10). *Given the anticipated difficult times and disruptions ahead resulting from Peak Oil and Climate Change, a resilient community is believed to be considerably better prepared than existing communities with their total dependence on heavily globalised systems for food, energy, transportation, health and housing.* A resilient community can function only if the members cooperate. So despite the emphasis on being self-sufficient, cooperation with different local stakeholders is considered vital for making the desired changes happen. **Cooperation** involves building bridges to local governments to ensure support to the transition ideas and facilitate the transfer of worthwhile ideas. Transitioners seek to complement the schemes made on the governance level addressing peak oil and climate change on global and national levels and make sure that they are realistic: *"Transition Initiatives complement these schemes by making sure that the changes they demand in the way we live our day-to-day lives can actually be put into practice at ground level"* (Brangwyn and Hopkins 2008: 7).

A community that is inclusive, diverse and cooperative is able to create collectively creating practical changes on the local scale, such as the energy descent action plan (EDAP). The EDAP encompasses different aspects of life from food, energy, education and health to tourism. In implementing EDAP, the group sustainability needs to be cared for first. The relevant qualities for the latter are ensuring diversity, inclusivity, openness, having a realistic local focus and the capacity to keep communication and cooperation with partners going. In fact, a clear commitment to strive for inclusivity across the entire initiative is seen as a prerequisite for becoming an official Transition initiative. To counteract some extremists and political groups participating in transition initiatives, the TN suggests its initiatives to explicitly state their support to the UN Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948), making it impossible for extreme political groups hailing discrimination as a key value to participate in the decision-making bodies. Being reliable, cooperative and communicative are further qualities relevant to ensure mutual trust in the team and with partners.

**This requires trusting the collective intelligence** by letting the movement *"go where it wants to go". This* leadership concept means allowing different impulses and interests shape the initiative to ensure its viability and wide support base. Allowing open space is seen relevant for ensuring creativity and innovation. As the collective intelligence is trusted, and the model is open and evolving, proactive individuals are invited to offer new insights or apply their creativity in developing the practices further.

**Inevitable urgency of cultural change** is the third core categoriy of this case with new positive story, awareness raising, education and creativity as its main properties. The SD approach of the TN is about developing locally grounded survival strategies. As governments' efforts are deemed insufficient, it is believed that people need to create them themselves. However, these survival strategies tend to have rather a positive, not a desperate mood to them. Ben Brangwyn, one of the founders of the network, has described **the positive transition vision** of a more sustainable future by arguing that less energy and resource intensive future could indeed better than the current system: *"A town using much less energy and resources than currently consumed could, if properly planned for and designed, be more resilient, more abundant and more pleasurable than the present."* (Brangwyn and Hopkins 2008: 10).

The initiative started with an environmental focus, concerned about climate change and resource depletion and the shift in focus to recognising the relevance of cultural aspects was gradual. It resulted in gathering experiences over the years by working locally on making transition happen. As Hopkins put it:

> *"..when I started this I thought of transition as an environmental thing. Now four years on I really see it as a cultural initiative. It's how do we change the culture of the place so that it is more resilient and has more 'bouncebackability' built into it? It's ultimately also environmental and economic. And one of the most powerful things is that Transition is about telling stories. So what transition groups are doing … is doing things which are really powerful dynamic stories"* (Hopkins 2011b)

Thus over the years the relevance of cultural aspects became increasingly obvious. The difficulty of dealing with the inner structures and deep-seated values and beliefs is admitted by describing them as incredibly complex. Attention shifted to the role that cultural stories have on the thoughts, values and behaviours of people facilitating or distracting transition. It also became clear that inner transition has to happen first and without it external transition remains limited. So over time the movement has become to be as much about inner transition as about outer transition.

The key aspect in change-making is believed to be the need for **a new positive story.** In a society that lacks any positive vision of the future and where the need for sustainable development is

communicated with stories of pollution, extinction and danger of catastrophes, it is difficult to motivate people to join the efforts, which seem in vain. One of the Transition Town Totnes (TTT) founders and creators of training programs Naresh Giangrande has recalled how he realised the need for a new cultural story to fill the current gap of complete unknowing on how to deal with the crisis (Findhorn New Story Community 2014). The development of TTT several years later was an attempt to fill this gap of unknowing by developing a creative and open-ended approach now known as the Transition model. So the Transition model was created consciously as a positive story. The need for a new cultural story has established itself as an overarching part of the Transition model, as a goal which the twelve steps initially articulated as transition ingredients lead to. As Giangrande put it: *"That is what transition initiatives are doing: creating a transition to a new cultural story. A new way of being, a new way that we could live on this earth that respects both planetary limits, but also creates a good life for everyone,"* (Findhorn New Story Community 2014).

The EDAP is a good example – it is considered more than just a strategy document, it emerges from the community and is *"as much about storytelling and visioning as planning,"* (Transition network 2012c). Its main aim is to form a positive, powerful, and practical story of the future. The process often starts with visioning a low-energy future by creating a local transition timeline (for example until 20 years from the present moment) and back-casting to the present day, telling year by year how the change was achieved, defining vital steps, catalysts and synergies needed to reach the goal. Its format is relatively open, offering much creative freedom: it can be a step-by-step plan with stated outcomes, a vision document, a story of how a powered-down future would look like, or a rewriting of council policies, showing how Transition would benefit all parties.

**How to make the cultural change happen?** The change-making approach taken by the transitioners is based on a positive empowering message instead of using fear or guilt as motivation and the plan is to change the underlying cultural story piece by piece, town by town, and project by project. In moving away from the high-energy way of doing things to a low-energy way by relocalising and creating a cultural value-change, the transformation is described as an opportunity for co-creating a better quality of life. Transition is aiming to create a realistic and positive vision of a fulfilling and sustainable future and creating this vision is seen as a continuous process. Thus visioning a healthy world is seen to lie at the heart of change-making. This encompasses a lower-energy future, but not in the sense of people having less energy, but of people needing much less energy for a fulfilled and happy life. Through localisation, people would have to drive much less to work and could stay closer to the people and places they know and care for. They need much less energy for transport and also for the food, as it would be produced much more locally again. There would be local renewable energy companies. People would have learned many new skills and become more flexible, have more time and know their neighbours again. Much energy could also be saved by sharing and doing things together – things that are much easier to do, once people have started to trust each other again. People would be actively and cooperatively making decisions concerning their village, town or city district and bottom-up community solutions have become a common practice. How exactly a sustainable way of life looks like in different settings, is something that has to be worked out in these settings – not from top-down. The collective genius of the local community is trusted to be the best expert in building resilience in all aspects of life.

**Awareness raising and education** (or training, as the network prefers to call it) **as seen as keys for making the necessary cultural change happen.** The network has developed a wide selection of training programs to facilitate change ranging from programs for beginners to programs for trainers of how to do transition. Raising awareness includes also books and films that offer information about the movement and its thematic approaches. In this field the TN has also cooperated with GEN and other partners, e.g. by developing the Transition to Resilience (T2R) training in the

framework of the EU Learning Partnership. **Creativity** and open co-creation are relevant aspects of the TN model for tansitioning towards SD.

As mentioned above, the **inner transition** has developed into an important aspect of the Transition model over the years. Heart and soul groups are usually the Transition initiative subgroups that gather to talk about and share with each other their experiences, emotions (often fears for change) and ideas related to transition. From the case study initiatives, Freiburg had such a group. While doing fieldwork in Freiburg and participating in the beginner course *Training for Transition*, we worked on deconstructing the daily belief sentences shaping our society and keeping it from changing. This helps to expose the values that the current society is using as motivation, including strong emotions of fear, being overwhelmed, uncertain, worthless, separated and lacking; and the measures for dealing with them, such as overcompensation and -consumption, seeking for control and status. The paramount importance of the inner aspects is nicely summarised in the course description:

> *"Understand that Transition is both an inner and outer, personal and shared journey. Experience a personally deepening journey into the inner dimension of Transition. Understand the need to address the emotional aspect of giving hard hitting, possibly overwhelming information as part of awareness raising activities. Understand ways in which our individual psychology, individual behaviour, collective behaviour and structures, shared culture and beliefs, are all interconnected with the problems in our outer systems, and that Transition needs to support and catalyse change in both inner and outer. Realise that there are internal defences against change, and learn how to create a positive environment for individuals and groups in which change is supported and therefore more likely. Have the opportunity to deepen your understanding of and connection to this work, and see how this deepening can enhance your personal, professional, and community wellbeing."*[18]

Thus, the TN has been increasingly emphasising the role of inner and cultural aspects in succeeding in sustainable change-making and granting resilience on the personal and communal levels.

What actions are precisely needed for sustainable development depends in the Transition model on local settings and needs. However, the central actions needed for sustainability transition according to the Transition network case are listed below.

**Table 20. The core theme and categories of Transition network case.**

| **Community-led energy decent** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Energy descent** | **Resilient communities** | **Cultural change** |
| Relocalisation | Openness | Positive vision |
| Simpler life | Respecting diversity | New story |
| Degrowth | Cooperation | Inner transition |
| Self-reliance | Trust in collective intelligence | Education |

**Community led energy decent** emerged as the core theme helping to ensure sustainable human development. The core categories helping to ahieve this goal are energy descent, resilient communities and cultural change.

### 4.1.2.5. Analysis of the transition cases

Based on the discussion of the core themes and categories of the transition cases, this section starts with a comparative analysis of the cases and finishes with a synthesising analysis of the sustainability approach of the Transition cases.

[18] Participant email sent to me about a Transition course I attended as part of the fieldwork in Freiburg in 2011.

**Comparative analysis of the transition cases.** At the time of research, the Transition movement was well established in Portugal and Germany with case sudy initiatives among the most active initiatives in their countries and members of the official network. Paide was the most active initiative in Estonia using transition approach. Although not part of the official network, it acknowledged transition model for useful methods and had implemented them for several bigger projects that others had not done yet, including the local Energy Decent Action Plan and setting up local currency. So it can be said that Transition network was seen by all participants as a useful brand, inspiration and an empowering model for sustainable development to "go viral".

Similarly to GEN-E, also the TN links many initiatives that were grounded years before the network or just independently of it. Whereas the Freiburg initiative was founded as a transition initiative, both Paide and Telheiras initiatives were created independently of it, but started to use the Transition approach as it fitted well with the direction of change they had already chosen. In Portugal many people in permaculture circles had similar projects going that were later rebranded as Transition initiatives as it inspired them and facilitated networking and finding like-minded people. The openness of the movement means that also independent initiatives like Paide can easily use transition framework for making local changes and be part of the broader transition movement. As a Freiburg member put it: *"I think Transition is also a brand that you can just use. We don't need to be transition initiatives; we just need to do transitions"* (FT, male, 20s).

Members of all cases were generally really hopeful about the movement as it offered practical methods for making a difference while being flexible in relation using them depending on the local needs and context. So using the transition approach did not mean applying a ready-made development model with little consideration for the local context. The fact that transition approach was open and continuously co-developed, was highly valued by participants and allowed different initiatives to use different ingredients of the model according to their needs. Also the comprehensive nature and positive proactive spirit for finding personal and communal solutions to pressing problems was considered inspiring:

> *"Transition is not only about growing your own vegetables and using solar panels; it is about building personal resilience and community resilience in increasingly uncertain times. It's about leading by practical example. It's a tool for turning problems into solutions. It has inherently the active part: what are we going to do about it"* (TE, male 40s).

Sustainability potential of the initiatives themselves was different – whereas the students behind the initiative in Telheiras were unsure about what will happen once they graduated and got jobs elsewhere, in Paide and Freiburg the initiatives had a more stable basis. At the time of research, the Paide initiative was quite dependent on the initiator, who had dedicated his life to reviving the urban community in Paide. In Freiburg the dedication was more divided among the core group members, and there altogether more members to carry the load of managing the different projects.

Paide, Freiburg and Telheiras are all urban transition cases, but their scope is quite different ranging from Paide, a small town in the middle of Estonia to Telheiras, a part of the capital city Lisbon in Portugal. Among these cases Freiburg was considered the greenest, being one of the greenest cities of Germany, often considered one of the greenest countries in Europe (see subchapter 3.4.2.3. for more info). So in terms of impact, the Freiburg initiative blended perhaps more into the general local scene than the Paide and Telheiras initiatives, which were more outstanding in their local settings. In terms of impact and pace of change, the processes initiated and facilitated by the initiatives were understood as real life experiments, unfolding differently in different settings depending on the local contexts. So change was primarily seen as a slow and locally defined process. Despite the urgency of

transition, case study participants were not intimidated by the small scale changes that they were gradually making. Indeed, they believed to make a big difference on the long run. As the initiator of the Freiburg described the situation relating to Totnes:

> *"They started to make their own energy company. It's like a revolution, because there you don't have, like in Germany, all those eco-electricity sellers. So, it is the first community owned-energy company – such things really makes a difference locally. And if all those thousands of transition initiatives have the same success like Totnes, it would be a great change"* (HF, male, 19).

When comparing Germany and UK, more specifically the city of Freiburg with the original Transition Town Totnes, it came out that several people had been disappointed when visiting Totnes, because it looked like a regular town with no visible signs of transition. This served as a proof that transition is primarily a social movement so the changes are developing visible results in the already built urban environments takes time:

> *"As local context is always different, it's always a new start. Each place has its own history and its own setting. But I guess in small towns it's much easier to get this process working. And in towns like Freiburg with 200 000 people, or Hamburg, Paris, it's quite tedious … because of the anonymity and scale of the place. Whereas in a small place like Totnes it can develop really quickly"* (AF, male, 50s).

Indeed, in case of a small town like Paide the visible signs of using the transition model were much faster apparent than in the already "green" city of Freiburg full of parallel initiatives working on their take of transition.

In terms of **thematic priorities for sustainability transition,** a number of differences between the Transition network and the three individual cases surfaced. The sustainable development understanding of the Transition movement rests largely on the synthesis of exsisting approaches. The movement initiator Rob Hopkins has described his approach to sustainability, underlying the transition approach, as simply taking Richard Heinberg's insights into peak oil, David Holmgren's on permaculture and David Fleming's on community resilience, rolling them together and making the whole thing comprehensible (Chamberlain 2010). In is noteworthy that in the individual cases only permaculture and to some extent David Holmgren as a permaculture teacher were more known from these influencers. Although climate change, peak oil and energy descent are central issues for the Transition network (Hopkins and Lipman 2009), they were not among the core issues for the individual cases. As the Paide core group member explained it:

> *"Talking about fear for something, like peak oil, is not the best way to approach people in a small Estonian town. People are very sceptical so it's better to be practical. So it is not that we avoid peak oil as a topic, but it just has not been among the central motivators of our movement here. It motivated Hopkins, but our project and visions have not been twirling around it"* (EP, male, 40s).

Also in Freiburg people were questioning the original emphasis on peak oil and climate change, asking if this was not too limited. When this question surfaced during the Training for Transition course in Freiburg during the feldwork phase, the reply was that first of all, talking about these topics is relevant as it helps to understand the cause of the movement, and second, that people are welcome to propose updates as transition is a work in progress.

Different members of the initiatives also had different perceptions of the aims of their initiatives, some considering transition first of all a social movement, the others an ecological and the thirds a cultural movement. The TN itself had transformed its self-perception as working with people had shown them over the years the relevance of cultural aspects. So the TN had started to recognise that transition requires first of all a **cultural change,** developing a new narrative with a positive vision.

For the transition cases the lack of a positive vision in our culture was among the central problems, resulting in competition, overconsumption and monocultures instead of cooperation and generating fear for change instead of practical solutions like need-based consumption or respecting diversity. The transition movement was believed to have a positive vision or a new story to bring about a positive change. It was interesting to observe that over the years of practical changemaking a shift from community-led environmental movement to recognising Transition as a cultural movement had taken place in the core group of the TN. Freiburg, Telheiras and TN cases emphasised the relevance of a new culture or a positive vision for turning towards more sustainable way of life explicitly, but it was also relevant in Paide, motivating the movement from the outset. This is a vision of energy decent, relocalising, reviving community, reskilling and reganing autonomy. The central message is that a town using much less energy and resources than currently consumed could, if properly planned and designed, be more resilient, abundant and pleasurable than the present. To make this cultural change happen, the transitioners used positive empowering messages instead of fear or guilt to motivate change. They also see that changing the underlying cultural story is possible piece by piece, town by town, project by project and person by person. The inner transition was recognised an aspect needed for coping with the current situations and contribute to swichting over to the new, positive story of the future. These aspects have helped people to avoid becoming overwhelmed or paralysed by the scale of needed changes and take responsibility on the grassroots level to decarbonise and break free from the petrocultur dependency. Instead of being overwhelmed, people felt motivated by the positive outlooks and good about coming together and making a difference on a realistic and manageable scale. In all cases people were hopeful while realising their positive visions. A Telheiras transitioner quoted his frend saying that it's not like we can change things for the better, but we can stop doing harm. All the interviewed members across the cases actually believed that they can do more – not only stop doing harm, but also change things for the better. So they shared a positive vision and were empowered by it while contributing to realising changes that seemed meaningful and relevant to them. Transition network has developed a wide range of trainings to help people to get started with transition or deepen their knowledge on some specific field of action. Educational offers are also a means to spread this positive vision, bring likeminded people together and encourage them to engage in inner and outer transition by providing a set of tried and tested tools.

In comparison to the Transition network, the focus of the individual cases was more on the social issues. **Reviving community** was one of the core solutions of the transition approach, relevant across all cases. To counteract the dominant disconnected way of life making people rootless and lacking a sense of belonging, reconnecting to a wider community of life is suggested as a solution. This includes not only reconnecting to other people by reviving community, but also to places that we live and visit, and reality of the consequences of out actions from interfering with natural systems. For this, openness is needed for accepting and respecting diversity, which is considered the key to resilience and quity. To foster reconnecting, creating opportunities for people to share with each other is considered relevant, e.g. places or events. Another way of raising social cohesion is telling stories and nurturing a caring culture. Popularising and normalising sharing can be helpful for overcoming the stance that sharing is a sign of poverty. Instead, it could be a sign of caring for the community of life. Reviving community also means learning to trust the collective intelligence. This is useful as it ensures that no single person tries to control the developments singlehandedly which guarantees resilience and creativity of the movement. A proactive attitude and creativity for reimagining the world are valued – for example creating jobs that resonate with people's values instead of simply serving economic growth. In several ways the needs and aims of the Telheiras and Paide initiatives were more similar than in the Freiburg case. For example, in Paide and Telheiras the focus of activities was directed to

reviving the local community. This included rekindling people´s interest in the place they live in and people they share it with. Enlivening the neighbourhood also involved efforts to relocalise relevant services in the area where people live, and raise awareness of empowering alternatives to the current way of life. In Paide the focus had also been on reconnecting to the roots in terms of heritage and relearning skills to be able to care for it. In Freiburg the focus was more on the need to create a shared community vision of the future. This had been already done in Paide, as well as establishing reskilling trainings and a workshop to use, building up the local community centre or the local currency to thank the volunteers with. Whereas Telheiras and Freiburg were dreaming of doing EDAP in the future, the Paide initiative had done one plan in early 2000nds and was revising it using EDAP as a tool. Also relocalising attempts to counteract the energy and time intensive commuting system were made both in Paide and Telheiras – in Paide to offer alternatives for local people commuting to work to bigger cities and in the Telheiras within the metropol of Lisbon on a daily basis. In both cases starting local businesses to offer jobs in home town/district was considered a goal to strive towards. In Freiburg relocalisation and commuting were less of an issue.

Despite the emphasis on regaining autonomy, transitioners are not lonely wolfs. They rather see themselves as part of the solution and seek cooperation with other societal groups, as solutions can be realised only in cooperation. For instance, in relation to the governance level, they tend to see their role as complementing the governance efforts and making sure that their plans remain practical and applicable on the local level. All the cases had cooperation experiences with local municipalities. Their attitudes were different – whereas in Telheiras there seemed to be no apprehension (despite some setbacks), in Paide the experiences and attitude were more mixed and in Freiburg the attitude was most critical. An example from the positive side are the projects in Telheiras for limiting the speed in their district to increase pedestrian security, or in Paide the creation of the EDAP-inspired development plan in cooperation with the city. From the negative side, the Freiburg initative members had made experiences with the Local Agenda 21 group where the local municipalities did not support, but hindered the ideas and initiatives of the citizens, creating certain scepticism. So for them the big benefit of the transition approach was that it was not dependent on the city officials. Also the Paide initiative pointed out the seeming participation as a problem: they had the experience of being heard, but not listened to, which had created frustration and prevented collaboration for what they saw as a common good.

Although taking responsibility did not appear explicitly among the central concepts in the analysis, it is a very present and relevant topic in this context. The positive, proactive stance of taking responsibility can be compared to the LDI spirit. It was suggested that talking can be done forever, but actually learning to live within planetary boundaries is about doing things differently here and now, or as Hopkins phrased it: ”*the power of just doing stuff*” (Hopkins 2013).

**Simpler life to restore autonomy**. As the governance level is not seen to make sufficient changes and tends to trust too much the political and technological solutions, which have not proven themselves so far, restoring autonomy is considered necessary for increasing relisience and ensure sustainable development. Next to the cultural and inner transition issues, increasingly more attention has been given in the recent years to the new economic models and community supported entrepreneurs. In comparison to other civil society movements in the sample, transition had the strongest focus on building up sustainable economies. Their approach was inextricably linked with relocalisation. So downscaling instead of upscaling, localisation instead of globalisation and no growth or degrowth instead of economic growth are considered reasonable because smaller is more resilient to possible shocks. A simpler, low-energy lifestyle might not sound appealing at first, but through the community with its more fulfilling and meaningful social relationships that provide a sense of well-being and

belonging without having to buy something or go somewhere, the transition solution should actually offer an improvement in the quality of life. This solution also includes energy decent, which learning to live more simply. Another aspect that supports the goal of increasing local resilience as well as cultural change is reskilling – learning anew skills widely spread some generations ago that have been forgotten in the urban consumer society[19]. Such skills might include repairing shoes, sewing, building furniture, gardening to grow food, cooking and backing or renovating one´s home. Rooted in an understanding of the need to become less dependent on fossil fuels, the Transition model offers practical tools for communities and local authorities to achieve both energy decent and a more involved and satisfied local population.

The depth and breadth of sustainability knowledge depended primarily on the backgrounds. Whereast the initators of the Transition network engaged in deep reflection on what is sustainable development and how to achieve it, the most participants of the individual cases found little to no time to enter such deeper reflection. This was, with a few exceptions, the case in the Freiburg and the Telheiras groups, who acted upon a belief that they had a shared understnaidng that just needs to be put to practice. On the example of Freiburg: there were many people like KF (female, 20s) who just felt that things were not right and wanted to have more local food, so they joined the urban gardening group. Some people like HF (male, 19), who was dedicating all his free hours to making transition work in Freiburg, leaving little time for reflection. And perhaps one to two persons like AF (male, 50s) who had decades of experiences in sustainability research and practice, helping others to see the interconnections of the bigger picture. The TN, Telheiras and Freiburg cases all shared permaculture as a relevant ideology for achieving resilience. Permaculture stresses the relevance of learning from nature and cooperating with it as all other dimensions depend on ecological sustenance. AF from Freiburg (male, 50s) interprets sustainable development in a similar spirit, suggesting that sustainable systems imitate how the world works and link humans systyems to it in an integrative manner, whereas the current practice can be described as attempts to subjecting nature as a subsystem to our anthropocentric system, which causes the crises as we are ignoring the fundamental laws of physics or ecology.

The Telheiras core group members were students of community psychology, biology or urban planning, and their understanding of SD was directly inspired by permaculture and transition ideas. When it came to the initiative, they characterised themselves as doers, not thinkers, so they based their actions on the transition and permaculture knowledge. In Paide the interest in sustainability grew slowly and organically out of the local needs and relocalisation efforts:

> „*After having established the [sustainable renovation] centre, running the courses and learning much about sustainable renovation, the next question was: renovation is clear, but what does the sustainable part actually mean? Thus the next step was making sense of sustainable development as a way of thinking and living*“ (EP, male, 40s).

What followed was a turn towards community building and testing out new economic solutions. So the Paide sustainability approach had a more learning-by-doing character than following any blueprints.

**Core themes and categories of the transition cases**

Next, a succinct synthesis of the ecovillage cases based on their core problems and solutions follows. Most of the main problem across the cases repeated in all or most cases. These were unsustainable globalised system, lack of a positive vision, disconnection dismantling community and causing rootlessness, and not taking responsibility referring to both citizens and the municipality level

[19] In Telheiras and Freiburg cases many skills in the urban context had been forgotten several generations ago, while in Paide the period of having forgotten is about one generation as the consumerism set in later in Estonia.

resulting in insufficient preparations and excessive trust in politics and technology to solve the problems.

The core themes of the transition cases summed up in Tabe 21 describe different ways of making change happen. Paide and Freiburg aimed for systems change by relocalising or taking responsibility, while Telheiras and Transition network focused on the way community helps in transition once revived, for example by leading energy decent. To find the core theme of the transition cases, also the core themes need to be analysed. The only concept occurring just once across the cases is energy decent – it is central in the approach of the Transition network, but much less so for the individual cases, being either absent or discussed under the concept of relocalising. As its main properties include relocalisation and the concept of relocalising occurs more often among the core issues, energy decent will be included as its property.

When looking at the core themes and categories together with their core properties, it becomes clear that the core categories restoring autonomy and taking responsibility can be summed up under one common denominator. As taking responsibility is more general and restoring autonomy more characteristic for the transition cases, the latter is more suitable as the core category. The most frequent categories were relocalising, restoring autonomy, reviving community and positive vision.

**Table 21. Transition cases: core themes and categories for moving towards SD.**

| | Transition cases |
|---|---|
| **Paide** | **Relocalizing to exit the system**: relocalising, reconnecting, restoring autonomy |
| **Freiburg** | **Taking responsibility for change:** systems change, positive vision, taking responsibility |
| **Telheiras** | **Reviving urban community**: positive vision, reconnecting, taking responsibility |
| **TN** | **Community-led energy decent**: energy descent, resilient communities, cultural change |
| **Synthesis** | **Relocalising for systems change**: positive vision, reviving community; restoring autonomy |

Relocalising the way of life to change the currently unsustainable systems was seen as the way towards personal and communal resilience and sustainable development. This requires having a positive vision of the future to support cultural change and reviving community to increase autonomy. Relocalisation means that as more is done locally, the local economy and wellbeing of people is supported, due to shorter transport less energy is needed, allowing energy decent – simpler life. Not being dependent of global systems and reconnecting to local systems is considered empowering.

## 4.1.3. LDIN case studies

### 4.1.3.1. LDI! Estonia case study

**Problems.** The problem that sparked the idea of a big-scale cleanup were the illegal dumping sites in nature, more specifically in the forests, and more generally in public spaces. It was considered problematic that there was so much wastefulness generating a lot of waste. Also, the passivity of people in terms of not doing anything about such disturbing littering was considered problematic. Trash was seen in the movement as a pressing ecological, economic and social issue born out of a worldview of separation from nature. So the problems needing to be addressed were not only the physical trash that needs to be cleaned up, but also the invisible, cultural aspects reflected in the ways of thinking and in behaviours recreating waste, leading to the renewed creation of waste. In fact, whole systems producing waste and dealing with waste were considered problematic and in need of improvements and change.

**Solutions for more sustainable development: core theme and categories.**

To **counteract waste** there needs to be a **positive vision** as an alternative to the current wasteful way of life. An innovative and ambitious positive alternative is believed to have the potential to inspire and engage people. Developing a positive alternative in the Estonian context was achieved by creating an innovative, ambitious and inclusive approach which developed into an accessible and empowering participatory model for joint action. The positive alternative of counteracting waste requires rethinking what is understood as waste by asking if what is considered waste could be used in some other way? What is further needed is a shift from cleaning up to reducing waste(fullness) in the first place. In long perspective such a shift would make clean-ups unnecessary. This positive alternative is not just a vision – it includes a tried and tested empowering model of change. The LDI vision and model encourages creating a world without wastefulness. This means from one hand doing practical actions to clean up the world and tackle the causes of reoccurring pollution, and from the other hand cleaning up the minds and changing the mindsets to overcome the reasons for the wasteful way of life. Tried and tested in various locations, it has helped to strengthen the voices of societal groups that stand for a less wasteful way of living, empowering individuals and groups by showing that they can make an impact and contribute to change. An ambitious vision and empowering model are also regarded as the driving forces behind the success of the movement, showing participants the power they hold to do good through cooperation.

The concept of **LDI spirit** is not an official part of the initiative's rhetoric, but was widely used among members. Participants understand it as a specific attitude: original, bold, positive, responsible, proactive, open, cooperative, inclusive, empowering and self-conscious, showing that it is possible to achieve good things for the common good through voluntary cooperation – let´s do it! Doing things considered meaningful and necessary together with likeminded people on a voluntary basis to can significantly boost the development of a strong and empowered civil society and is directly related to the phenomenon called LDI spirit in this movement. The LDI spirit is an enabling state of mind and way of acting that helps to get things done – together, in an inclusive, open and co-creative manner. It includes proactive attitude of taking responsibility for the common good, open cooperation and recreating community. Supporting a proactive attitude offers a means of expression for the (dormant) activity of society members, enabling them to be participants, not passive consumers, and sparking synergetic partnerships. The LDI spirit is an active, open and collective attitude to change-making, credited as the key to the vitality of the movement. With its communal, inclusive focus the movement rekindles relationships and sparks community well beyond the once-a-year campaign framework. One of the main keys to success of the Estonian initiative has been its enthusiastic, well-motivated team with expertise in different fields from communication and marketing to innovative, up-to-date software solutions. So also certain professionalism forms a part of the LDI movement in the Estonian case. Regularity is also one of the keys to long-term success as it gives stability and reliability. As one interview partner TE (male, 40s) commented: one of the most important differences between LDI and other projects is the fact that it is regular and annual, happening on the 1st Saturday of May in Estonia, so people can count on it. It has been remarked that for Estonians, there are not many events that the whole country would enjoy together that are able to release such powerful emotions of unity and wellbeing (Zhordania 2014). However, one such event is the choral singing festival called "laulupidu", happening regularly, where a huge number of Estonians come together to sing. In a way, the cleanup events are able to create a similar emotion, and TE (male, 40s) comments that this might be one of the reasons people volunteer, as it unites the entire country as a whole, regardless of their everyday differences.

Openness and inclusion are essential for cooperation according to the LDI spirit. This includes sharing experiences and information among interested parties for free on a voluntary basis. In this spirit, everyone is invited to contribute to the common cause. Cooperation took on various forms, including support received in services and products, for example, partners having organised the transport of garbage, or food for the volunteers. *"The impulses which make people cooperate, are different. But once they start, there is hope that they start including other aspects and topics as well, that the cooperation broadens"* (TE, male, 40s). In Estonia the cooperation has broadened and the success of the LDi intiative shows, that this has happened also internationally.

Conteracting waste requires a vision of a positive alternative and LDI spirit that encourages and joins people together to fulfil this vision. What is the result? A systems change away from the current wasteful way of life to zero waste. What more is needed to achieve such a change? Awareness raising to overcome the illusion of disconnectedness, adopt a worldview of connectedness and create synergetic partnerships. In order to show how big the problem is, the team turned to mapping the problem to locate the illegal trash sites, and estimated the type and amount of garbage. This was done with the help of a virtual garbage map. This free waste mapping application using the Google Earth software made it easy for people to participate in mapping the waste (LDIW 2013). Outreach activities were considered essential for achieving a shift in focus from cleaning up to reducing waste(fullness). Estonian team chose a very professional approach to achieving systems change, gathering top professionals from a wide range of fields as team members, including people from PR and marketing who contributed vitally to the success of the initiative. By reaching out to citizens, NGOs, municipalities, politicians and opinion leaders, the team was able to gather hundreds of partners and create synergetic win-win partneships. This further helped to broaden the impact of the initiative. Also a part of awareness raising and partnerhipf creating activities, the Estonian team started to organise LDI conferences to facilitate networking and knowledge exchange in different places around the world since 2010. The conferences provide information encouraging different nations and groups to participate and organise their own clean-ups, as well as an opportunity for existing initiatives to exchange experiences and get to know other activists. An important aspect in the perspective of the Estonian LDI initiative was also adopting a worldview of connectedness and respect for nature. The initiators draw inspiration from a rich variety of sources such as permaculture, GEN´s Gaia education, Waldorf and Montessori pedagogics and anthroposophy. Despite their differences, they all share a holistic worldview. It is believed that systems change can only succeed when synergetic partnerships across sectors are built based on a shared understanding of interconnectedness of life.

> *"Each system has its time, logic, and if needed, an end. There are very many intelligent people on the governance level, they just might not have the info, which they could have. So cooperation is very important to bring about a breakthrough"* (KI, female, 30s).

Open cooperative stance also means that no contradiction is perceived between the civil society and governance levels, and a cooperative approach and relationship have been developed with the governance level.

The central solutions for moving towards more sustainable development are listed in the table below.

**Table 22. The core theme and categories of the LDI! Estonia case.**

| Counteracting waste | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Positive vision** | **LDI spirit** | **Systems change** |
| Rethinking waste | Proactive attitude | Awareness raising |
| Shift to reducing waste | Open cooperation | Synergetic partnerships |
| Empowering for change | Recreating community | Worldview of connectedness |

Counteracting waste emerged as the core theme and central solution with having a positive vision, LDI spirit and working towards a systems change as the core categories and actions needed to realise the solution.

### 4.1.3.2. LDI! Germany case study

**Problems.** Wasteful way of living and consumer mentality were considered the main problems. The initators observed that Germany which has long had a reputation as a clean country, is not so clean any more. Despite that they experienced that many people did not see the need for clean-ups because they did not notice garbage in their environment. The initiative members considered it problematic that people often chose not to see the garbage (e.g. in Bochum). Even if they did and were irritated by the situation (e.g. in Leipzig, Karlsruhe or Munich), they tended not to take action: *"What I heard was that they are pissed when it is not clean and say its corruption and the politicians just take the money without doing much. They are just upset, but they don't think that they could do anything about it"* (ED, male, 70s).

Instead, they tended to demand that the change would come from elsewhere, as they felt that they have the right for a clean environment: *"Why should I clean the country? It is clean, and if there is something lying around, the governments' waste disposal [system] is working properly, that is what we pay our taxes for!"* (AD, female, 20s). Germans do pay more taxes than people in some other countries, but the passive consumer mentality that underlies this attitude can be described as complacent. Such mentality results in certain passivity where people consume things that are "green" and separate their trash, but they refuse to do anything out of their comfort zone: "*I think people just don't like trash. Maybe because of hygiene or they just don´t want to get their fingers dirty. It´s not cool. Everybody wants to be green, but nobody wants to actually do it when it is dirty"* (AD, female, 20s). Here the team differentiated between "honest green people" who take responsibility and people who pretend to be green because it is popular. In a number of cases also fear for competition emerged as a problem, especially if the local municipality already had a cleanup day (e.g. in Karlsruhe). So instead of joining forces to create bigger synergy, the LDI cleanup was benned from happening at the same time as it might blur the image of the original local cleanup.

**Solutions: core theme and categories**

Counteracting complacency describes the key action taken by the volunteers to overcome the biggest obstacle that emerged in the process: complacency from the side of the governance representatives who wished to avoid extra work and an unknown endeavour, as well as from the side of citizens who preferred complaining about the waste without being willing to do anything about it themselves. Thus, counteracting complacency signifies counteracting a passive consumer mentality and encourages taking responsibility for the situation.

**Changing the mind-sets** was considered highly relevant for change. A number of worldview related aspects were mentioned as causes of the crises, so it maked sense that in the German case mental waste was seen as the root cause of unsustainability. For example, KD commented that sustainability means the ability to be reflective and consider causes and consequences of the choices: *"For me sustainability is to check every project to see how it will develop and influence in the future years*" (female, 30s). In line with the goal of the LDI movement of changing the mind-sets, an alternative understanding of waste causing much was used in Germany – namely the mental waste:

> *"It is important to ask – what do we understand under waste? There's physical waste, but then there's also psychological waste. Because prejudices are also a type of waste. And this is the*

*biggest problem in the Western world – not the physical, but the mental waste. This causes the problems we have"* (BD, male, 30s).

In the German context, where illegal garbage is a much smaller problem than in many other countries, this approach had the potential to stand out and be noticed, but as the initiative remained generally under the radar of mass media, this did not happen.

**LDI spirit**, as understood by the German group, included voluntary synergetic efforts to cooperate in order to make a difference and improve the situation around garbage issues. The LDI spirit was mentioned many times by the younger interviewees as the motivation for their engagement and commitment and as a force that united the team across Germany. The team met only once in real life, so the shared LDI spirit was believed to be the unifying factor. LDI spirit was understood as a common positive and proactive attitude along with willingness to make a difference even if it meant extra voluntary work and effort: *"We somehow have a similar perception of the world. And that connects us even if we don't know each other so personally. As if we share the same values and cultural background, although we come from different countries"* (KD, female, 20s). Also when considering backing out, contact with other team members encouraged to carry on

Not all people participated out of LDI spirit. For example, in 2012 a well-known local politician visited the team on the Karlsruhe market square for less than 10 minutes picking up three items of trash while being photographed for publicity purposes (the elections were near).

Changes starting on the individual level by taking responsibility were considered relevant. The change begins in this movement on the micro-level, with individuals deciding to make a difference and joining the team to contribute to the cause of a less wasteful world. Small changes are not regarded as superficial feel-good actions that do not actually change anything. However, neither is it imagined that a single person has too many options for making a difference. Through the community and civil initiatives, the possibilities to make a difference are considered broader.

**Cooperation** is one of the most relevant keywords of the LDI spirit and the initiators tried as best they could to establish partnerships. However, cooperation within the team and with participants, businesses and local governments was very uneven across Germany, reflecting the fragmented and uneven character of the national network. Cooperation tended to be better in the case of personal real life contact than in the case of only email or telephone communication. Engaging other environmental groups like Greenpeace proved to be more difficult than expected, as people lacked time for a new initiative. Also, it was observed by a volunteer in Leipzig that when an initiative had a good social standing, like the European day for garbage reduction, other initiatives found resources for participation: *"So the cooperation is often a question of prestige, and when the initiative comes from citizens it is less prestigious than when the EU is financing and organising it"* (BL, male, 30s). This indicated that despite the decree from the European Parliament, the lack of funds and relatively low social status of the local initiator in Lepizig meant that the LDI initiative´s social status was too low for successfully engaging other initiatives. In fact, the organisers across Germany experienced mistrust towards their grassroots initiative and commented in a reflexive group interview afterwards that cooperation would have been easier if they had had a formal organisation.

Cooperation with city governments worked in some cases, but with limited success. Not all participating initiatives contacted their local authorities. This was done for example in Munich and Karlsruhe, where local officials made it difficult to organise clean-ups:

*"The girl from Munich was really frustrated about how dirty Munich is, and she talked to the municipality because she wanted to organise a bigger cleanup in March or April, and the municipality told her that she cannot do it because it is too dangerous. Because it is on the streets and there are cars on the streets. So they prohibited her"* (AD, female, 20s).

Cooperation with businesses worked out in some cases (e.g. Bochum team partnered up with TerraCycle, who upcycles cartridges and cell phones), while in others, the locals had to invest themselves to buy the necessary gloves and garbage pickers (e.g. Karlsruhe).

**Making a difference is the third core category of the German case.** For making a difference having a shared positive vision of a less wasteful world was considered necessary. Here both the mental and physical waste was kept in mind and cleaning up both levels was considered necessary. So cleaning up was not just the physical activity, but also the inner acivity. For that overcoming passivity and taking responsibility are considered necessary. The shared positive vision and meaningful goal of a clean planet motivated and inspired people along the way. Another relevant prerequisite was overcoming fragmentation. The current societal system was experienced as very individualistic, where individual wishes and perferences play the first violin over the collective or community interests. So achieving more SD it is believed that broader understanding of the effects of individual actions are needed – and not only to the individual him/herself, but also to the broader community of life.

The central solutions are listed in the table below as core theme, categories and their key poperties.

**Table 23. The core theme and categories of the LDI! Germany case.**

| Counteracting complacency | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Changing mind-sets** | **LDI spirit** | **Making a difference** |
| Reflexivity | Taking responsibility | Positive vision |
| Simpler living | Awareness raising | Cleaning up |
| mental waste cleanup | Cooperation | Overcoming fragmentation |

Counteracting complacency emerged as the core theme and solution according to this case. The main categories supporting achieving this solution were changing the mind-sets, LDI spirit and making a difference.

### 4.1.3.3. LDI! Portugal case study

**Problems.** The central problem prompting the movement in Portugal were the many illegal waste dumps in forests, beaches and urban areas across Portugal. The aim of the first cleanup was to make a difference and clean up Portugal in one day. The wish to clean up Portugal was also reflected in the initiative name *Limpar Portugal*, which means cleaning up Portugal.

The second aim was to send a signal to municipalities all over the country that despite the financial difficulties, people expect them to become more active in waste issues and do a better job in this sphere. The municipalities did not have sufficient capacity and resources – time, money, sometimes willingness – to clean the dumping sites up. The participants felt a need to improve garbage management in Portugal showing the local municipalities that people care about the environment and want changes.

The third problem was the lacking environmental awareness and understanding about the impact and extent of littering in Portugal. The initiators wanted to attempt to organise a similarly successful cooperation event in Portugal as the original event in Estonia in 2008 to strengthen civil society and make a big impact.

**Solutions for more sustainable development: core theme and concepts**

**Rethinking waste** emerged as the core theme of this case. It entails addressing waste-related problems including counteracting material waste and changing values and habits that enable and perpetuate wastefulness. Rethinking waste requires active, responsible citizens and municipalities actively

engaged in capacity building to understand the problems and change the mind-sets in order to stop wasting and transform the wasteful systems.

Rethinking waste requires adopting a proactive and responsible stance described as **LDI spirit**. Let's Do It spirit means taking responsibility for making a difference and becoming active as a volunteer to participate and cooperate in projects and initiatives that support positive change. LDI spirit seems to create a kind of community of likeminded people. Working together for common good empowered as they saw that voluntary work can make a big difference: *"More than the numbers, it was the interaction and the result that made us feel that in fact if we want to change the world, we can do it, even if very slowly"* (AP, male, 50s).

By cleaning up illegal dumping sites, the participants saved millions of euros to the state and municipalities, showing people in economically impaired Portugal that people can make a major difference despite lacking finances: *"The merit of this initiative is that it proved that it is possible to establish and develop socially relevant projects without taking money for it"* (AP, male, 50s). Willingness to cooperate was considered an inalienable part of the LDI spirit. In the Portuguese case, cooperation included NGOs, businesses, governance and private persons. In this respect, logistics and waste handling provide a good example. All the logistics was organised by local groups with local partners. About half of the collected garbage was sent to recycling, the rest was sent to public landfills and private operators partnering with the local groups. Cooperation was also good with the governance level from municipal officials to the heads of the state. For example, the President of Portugal Anibal Cavaco Silva took over patronage to the initiative in 2010 and 2012.

**Capacity building** is the second core category. Several members estimated that this initiative enhanced environmental awareness and increased intervention capacity of Portuguese people:

> *"Since 2010 we believe that Portuguese people are more aware of the problem of illegal dump sites in Portugal. Once they were confronted with the real dimension of the problem in the field, many volunteers were shocked and became aware of suspicious activities regarding dumping garbage in the forest and started to report to authorities"* (AP, male, 50s).

The positive impact was that hundreds of thousands of Portuguese people became more aware of the waste problem and contributed to cleaning up.

Awareness raising is considered by interview partners as the main result of the clean-ups, done via educational offerings and encouraging public debates:

> *"The main result of this initiative cannot be measured in numbers but in attitudes, contributing to a more coherent society more aware of the value of nature and the impact that our daily actions have on it"* (AP, male, 50s).

Shift in focus: from cleaning up to ending wastefulness. Participants were often motivated by broader goals than cleanliness. The wish to achieve long-term change and not having to keep cleaning up forever was frequently expressed. To advance this, awareness raising and environmental education coupled with inner work were seen as central topics.

> *"Our work in facilitating transition and mobilising people to daily action and awareness expansion goes far deeper than the apparently simple issue of garbage disposal, or respective cleaning. We are daily working to modify our own consumption habits, decisions and uneflexive behaviours, personally and collectively speaking… We ARE changing ourselves, and in that process, great changes will ultimately manifest in the world around us"* (LP, male, 50s).

Further motivational aspects include the wish to take responsibility, raise awareness and provide environmental education concerning the waste problem. In the later years, the topic of sustainable

growth was added to the project description, but this was not reflected in the interviews, thus testifying that it remained too abstract a goal for the participants.

The youth was also included with different schools and youth organisations participating. For example both the Eco-schools Program (Programa Eco-Escolas) and the National Scouts Corp (Corpo Nacional de Escutas) involved their students and members in raising awareness and/or cleanup actions. Hundreds of educational institutions, from kindergartens to secondary schools, which have joined this initiative promoted actions of environmental education that affected not only the students but indirectly also their families.

**Systems change is** the third core category. Rethinking waste requires systems change by stopping waste, strengthening civil society and pressuring municipalities to take action. Stopping waste requires a shift in focus. First of all it requires stopping polluting and living in a wasteful way. The second step is cleaning up the consequences of the wasteful way of life. The third step is shifting the focus from dealing with the consequences and capacity building to making systems change happen. For making change happen, strengthening civil society is needed. Limpar Portugal in 2010 was one of the largest collective mobilisations around an environmental cause ever in Portugal, and according to some interviewees, the biggest civil initiative ever. By engaging a broad spectrum of participants across generations and age groups, it empowered people and made it clear how much they can change if they act together. It also made it possible to make a political statement and activate the governance level and local municipalities to improve waste management procedures. Several interviewed stakeholders commented that this initiative helped to remind leaders that people care about the environment and making caring about nature national priority is their responsibility. Both the Environmental State Secretary (Secretaria de Estado do Ambiente) and Portuguese Environmental Agency (Agência Portuguesa do Ambiente) were involved in the preparation of the cleanups, producing special legislation so that the volunteers could send some of the collected garbage to state landfills.

An overview of the central solutions according to this case are listed in Table 24 below.

**Table 24. The core theme and categories of the LDI! Portugal case.**

| Rethinking waste | | |
|---|---|---|
| **LDI spirit** | **Capacity building** | **Systems change** |
| Taking responsibility | Awareness raising | Stopping waste |
| Volunteerism | Environmental education | Strengthening civil society |
| Cooperation | Changing mindsets | Activating governance level |

The core theme and central solution of this case is rethinking waste, involving the proactive LDI spirit, need for capacity building and systems change as three core categories and central fields of action.

### 4.1.3.4. LDI! network case study

**Problems.** Wastefulness and the pollutive nature of the capitalist consumer societies are seen as the central problems causing unsustainability. The consumer societies produce a lot of garbage. Often, sometimes legally, sometimes illegally, garbge is not disposed of in an environmentally and socially sustainable way. The resulting pollution knows no national borders. As it starts to decompose, the leaking harmful toxins and particles contaminate the soil, water and air, posing a threat to the health of the planet and its inhabitants.

The next problem is the way many people choose to stay passive, just accepting the current situation and continuing in the unsustainable systems. The movement sees mistakes in the system and in thinking which allow this wasteful and polluting situation to persist and worsen:

*"This pollution is both visual as well as mental. You have the choice when you pass it by whether to keep on running, as that is the reason for being in the forest, to start cleaning the garbage or not to return to the forest. Most probably you keep on running. And then I thought that this is in many ways the worst thing – to get used to the garbage and not to notice it anymore"* (TL, male, 40s).

Lacking capacity and/or will of local municipalities and companies for cooperating with volunteers was seen as a further problem**.** Dealing with communal waste at illegal dumpsites is the responsibility of local municipalities. However, in some instances volunteers willing to help the municipalities were discouraged not welcomed. From the case study groups the reluctance from local municipalities and waste disposal companies was experienced in Germany, from other LDI initiatives Slovenia and Romania had had similar problems (Selge 2014). In these cases the LDI initiative was not seen in a positive light as voluntary help from the citizens to improve the garbage management system and draw more attention to cleanliness issues, but instead as a cause for unwanted extra work, threat and competitor to existing cleanup brands or unwanted criticsm of the current system.

**Solutions for more sustainable development: core theme and categories**

**Counteracting waste(fulnes)** emerged as the core theme of the LDI network, summarising the *raison d'être* of the network: creating a global awareness raising and cleanup network with a threefold goal: cleaning up illegal garbage from nature, raising awareness to change wasteful behaviour and practices by supporting more intelligent and sustainable waste management principles, and empowering civil society (both individuals and local communities) by bringing people together and encouraging them with positive vision, doable steps and inclusive LDI attitude.

To counteract waste, the movement has a positive vision. It is more than a vision of a clean world with no illegal dumpsites. The vision of a sustainable world is that there is no need for clean-ups, because people do not litter irresponsibly and manufacturers do not produce senselessly. There would be no illegal garbage piles in the oceans or on land. Waste would be treated as a resource. For example, plastic would be regarded as a valuable material, not trash and the gratis plastic bags would be banned. To achieve this vision of a more sustainable way of life, pollution reduction is needed. An important aspect here is related to health. Both environmental health or the health of the planet, but also – and depending on it – the health of life on the planet, including human life. This aspect also has to do with responsibility and change of mind-sets. As a participant put it: *"For me sustainability is an approach to life whereby we consider in every step that there are people coming after us as well and how we could treat ourselves, each other and environment in a way that we could create or leave behind a healthy environment also for the future generations*" (KL, female, 30s).

Cleaning up is a major part of counteracting waste. It is relevant to note that waste is not understood in this movement just as physical garbage, but also as an expression of human attitudes that produce waste and need changing in order to achieve more sustainable development. Thus reducing wastefulness includes addressing two levels – cleaning up the world from excessive trash and changing the mindsets. The physical waste issue is more obvious as there are 7 billion people and 100 million tonnes of garbage on earth and the same amount in the oceans which poses a serious pollution challenge (World Cleanup Day 2014). The clean-ups of physical trash have played an important role in empowering people. The results of joint efforts of one day or a cople of hours of cleaning are produced fast and give a sense of contentment of having done something meaningful to the participants. These clean-ups allow people to meet likeminded people in their regions, which also empowers and encourages people. Systems change is aimed at in order to really counteracte wastefulness. The LDI network also attempts to tackle the root causes of wastefulness and pollution by visiting manufacturers and meeting with policy-makers. The central question is how to change the

whole way of life so that there would be much less garbage. For attaining this goal, cooperation with movements such as Zero Waste, private enterprises as well as governance structures is sought. For instance, as 80% of the garbage collected during clean-ups is plastic, the initiative is pushing governments to ban plastic bags and holding talks with plastic bottle manufacturers. However, waste and pollution are seen as a starting point, a wakeup call, not an aim in itself. The aim of the movement is not to continue picking up garbage, but to contribute to a systems change resulting in a development towards a society that does not waste. This requires tackling mental waste, which enables this level of pollution to be created, by awareness raising, and by taking responsibility for one´s actions and for the places we live in.

**LDI–spirit.** The LDI spirit is proactive, open-minded, inclusive, ambitious and persistent. Overcoming passivity requires taking responsibility in one´s own hands in order to make the desired systems change happen. This, in turn, requires having a common goal and vision that motivates and inspires people to participate and cooperate on a voluntary basis to make it happen:

> *"What keeps us going is the responsibility for the world. I think that we cannot let go because it is such a big idea that it would be irresponsible to say that we will not continue with it. And it also has to do with having created the organisation ourselves and gathered the people with whom we want to work with daily. This is a great chance and there is no reason to stop"* (KL, female, 30s).

The power to make a difference is seen to lay in inclusive cooperation. As Rainer Nõlvak, one of the initiators of the LDI movement put it: *"This action is not just for lovers of Nature, it is intended as a worldwide awakening to reality that waste is the most misused feature everywhere"* (LDIW 2011). The clean-ups bring people together, which creates networks of likeminded people. The use of internet-based solutions has helped to build up and maintain the worldwide (virtual) LDI-community. In the inclusive cooperation practiced in LDI network, there is space for both voluntary work and inclusion of professionals. The experience of LDI movement has shown that having a professional, well-connected team with strong PR skills is one of the keys to success of the international LDI team Estonian team from which it grew out. Significant efforts to cooperate with different stakeholders including the media, NGOs, schools, youth organisations, companies, public administration and politicians has been made by the network. In several countries, including Estonia and Portugal, the presidents and other local celebrities have acted as patrons and participated in the clean-ups, adding prestige and reliability to the projects, lending it symbolic capital. In Germany and Portugal, where the teams were less well connected, the initiatives were shorter lived and less successful despite sharing the LDI spirit in the sense of proactive, ambitious and inclusive cooperation for the common good.

Cooperation with different stakeholder groups is needed to fulfil the vision of clean and less wasteful world. An empowered and conscious civil society and power structures acting as good partners of the initiative are part of successful cooperation to make the transformation process happen. The Estonian, Portuguese and international LDI case study groups have had excellent cooperation, support and participation from the governance and administrative levels. For example in 2011 the LDI network initiated with the support from Estonian and Slovenian members of European Parliament the approval of the "Written declaration of the European Parliament on Cleanup in Europe and Let's do it World 2012", expressing support for the global cleanup campaign (European Parliament 2011a, European Parliamenr 2011b). The declaration was forwarded to the European Commission, European Council and the governments and parliaments of the 27 Member States with the aim to facilitate cooperation and inspire millions of people to join the cause, paving way for the success of the World Cleanup 2012 with 139 cleanup events (Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2013). The network members believe that the support of the governance structures helped to build trust and facilitated the successful cooperation across Europe and beyond. A further example is the cooperation with the Estonian

Foreign Ministry in introducing and popularising the Let's Do It! World Cleanup campaigns. Recognising the global value of the movement as a contribution to establishing sustainable development in practice (2013), the Minsitry helped to introduce the World Cleanup at the Rio+20 conference in Brazil in 2012, to organise an exhibition about the movement in the United Nation's headquarters in Geneva in 2013, and nominated the campaigns for 2012 and 2013 as candidates for the 2013 UN Prize in the Field of Human Rights for promoting a clean environment all over the globe, its global potential for offering constructive ways for dealing with environmental concern, and supporting taking one's civic duty in societies where civic initiatives are badly needed in order to strengthen democracy (LDIW 2013b). Supported by these contacts the Let's Do It! became an accredited member of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2014 (LDIW 2014). Among the case study countries, only in Germany the cooperation with the governance level was troubled. Some the local municipalities forbid the action in Munich and Karlsruhe, forcing it to happen on a different time to avoid collision (and cooperation) with existing cleanup actions to avoid possible blurring of the image of the latter, or prescribed that the cleanup had to be kept small to reduce the need of extra hours invested in cleaning up collected garbage. So, despite the European Parliament's Written Declaration, some municipalities failed to appreciate the win-win potential of cooperating with the LDI movement to raise awareness, include more people and have much garbage cleaned up at once.

It is considered relevant not to depend on the power structures to initiate the change. So the LDI network seeks to empower individuals and the civil society to reach make a difference by offering the chance to do something relatively simple and become part of something big and meaningful. The initial slogan *"one day, one country,"* and the later idea of a joint world cleanup on one day have managed to mobilise many people worldwide. The goals of the movement are ambitious – from cleaning up one country in one day to clean up the whole planet in one day. The movement aims to empower people so that instead of waiting for somebody to do something to make a difference, they would have the courage, initiative and resilience to initiate the change themselves and keep it going until the ambitious goal has been achieved. What empowers people is that the clean-ups bring people together and give them encouraging real life examples and experiences, creating a community of likeminded people. This community can be both in real life as well as virtual, both modes reinforcing each other. Although the structure of the movement is open and network-like, there is a clear identification with it, and despite its open form, it has been stably viable since 2008.

By the beginning of 2015, the network had over 14 million participants from 112 countries working together for cleaning up the planet, keeping it clean and raising awareness of alternative, less wasteful ways of living. This made LDI movement one of the fastest growing civic movements in modern times. In several countries, e.g. Portugal, Albania and Bulgaria, LDI became the biggest civic initiative and in some cases, the first big public movement. In Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia at least 5% of the local population had been involved in clean-ups. It is believed that *"5% of any organisation or unit is the critical amount for an idea to go viral and start spreading on its own"* (Zhordania 2014). So to reach the desired transformation in the global society, the movement has set itself another ambitious goal: to involve 380 million people by 2018 (amounting to ca 5% of the world's population), as this is the estimated amount to create a lasting change (LDIW 2014). As the examples from different countries show, the open, cooperative, empowering and proactive LDI spirit has already contributed to strengthening the (global) civil society.

**Changing mind-sets** is not just about taking the responsibility to pick up litter – it is also about questioning why it was put there in the first place and how to change the careless habits resulting from wasteful overconsumption and –production. Apart from that, it includes changing the understanding of

what is waste or garbage in the first place. In these activities, the LDI movement is part of a broader movement attempting to influence waste legislation and management to change the wasteful system.

As waste is a worldwide problem, the solution must also be worldwide. The solution of the LDI movement is to change the present situation and save the world from wastefulness by changing the way people think and act. The strength of the movement is that it offers a positive and doable model for making change happen coupled with a positive vision of a more sustainable world that motivates and mobilises people. What the LDI network is doing is practical, understandable and meaningful, the model has been tried and tested in different locations across the world and there are people who are willing to share their experiences and lend support, if needed. Offering support and a toolbox of doable actions to contribute to the ambitious plans of a clean and healthy planet addresses and motivates people and facilitate awareness raising about the importance of counteracting wastefulness. The movement empowers and raises awareness about the ways to counteract carelessness and negligence. Careless people and systems often use nature as their garbage bin and are ignorant about their responsibility. To change this, the LDI initiative actively campaigns to raise awareness of the impact of wastefulness, using when possible the help of PR professionals to make it their ambitious and positive efforts visible and make it difficult to remain ignorant. The movement aims to include more and more people into taking responsible action and making a difference. Cleaning up the results of our own actions is a good start for awareness raising, but the point is not to continue cleaning up after people who do not understand or care. The aim is not to keep the clean-ups going, but to achieve sufficient changes which would ultimately make the movement unnecessary:

> *"In 2018, we intend to engage 150 countries and 5% of the world's population—that is 380 million people—for one big World Cleanup Day. Imagine a powerful "green wave" starting in Japan and ending in Hawaii with hundreds of millions of people taking positive action together on the very same day. Let's Do It! has never been only about cleaning up waste. We also aim to unite the global community, raise awareness and implement true change to achieve our final goal – a clean and healthy planet,*" (LDIW 2015).

This can be achieved by getting to the root of the problem and changing environmental legislation and establishing environmental education programs across the globe. The strong LDI brand with its successful image, global network and tried and tested action toolbox all benefit this cause.

Open, accessible communication is one of the keys to the success of the movement. The change is facilitated by including professional and transparent communication practices. The rapid spread of LDI movement has been achieved by freely sharing the gathered experiences and making it available online, sharing information through personal networks, strengthened by meeting eye-to-eye on LDI conferences worldwide and active use of virtual channels (e-mail lists, Twitter, Youtube, social networks like Facebook, Ning and so on). Such open and accessible communication and sharing makes mutual learning possible. Sharing experiences makes people curious, at the same time providing support and inspiration for adapting the practices in local settings. Informal and formal forms of environmental education has become one of the focus points of the movement as a tool for changing the mind-sets and behaviours of the new generations. Different methods are used, including computer games. Some countries like Portugal, Kosovo or Lithuania have used schools as a relevant contact point.

The use of top technology is an important part of the LDI solution for several reasons. For one technology helps the virtual community to stay in touch, share experiences and receive advice and support if needed. Developing LDI apps and games has helped to raise awareness of the initiative and its central concerns among new target groups. One of the most relevant aspects is the use of a virtual garbage map which has enabled to get a clear understanding of how big the problem of illegal garbage actually is.

Table 25 below lists the core theme along with core categories and their main properties as central solutions according to the casae study of the LDI movement.

**Table 25. The core theme and categories of the LDI-N case.**

| Counteracting waste(fullness) | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Systems change** | **LDI spirit** | **Changing mindsets** |
| Positive vision | Taking responsibility | A doable model of change |
| Pollution reduction | Empowering | Awareness raising |
| Healthy planet | Inclusive cooperation | Accessible communication |
| Mental and physical cleanup | Creating community | Mutual learning |

The core theme and central solution according to this case is counteracting waste(fulness), involving both physical waste as the attitudes that cause and facilitate wastefulness. The core concepts as main fields of activity helping to counteract waste(fulnss) were working for systems change, adopting the proactive LDI spirit and changing the mindsets.

### 4.1.3.5. Summarising analysis of the LDI cases

The iterative analysis of the Let´s do it cases resulted in remarkably similar core themes and categories. This section provides a comparative and summarising analysis of the SD approaches of the LDI cases.

The LDI cases were perhaps more diverse than the ecovillage or transition cases as here there were also unsuccessful cases that had ceased to exist by the end of the research phase[20].

LDI model was seen by participants as a helpful, doable and empowering way to bring people together to clean up their neighbourhoods and raise awareness for rethinking waste and wastefulness. The loose model consists of team building, problem-mapping, cleanup action(s), communication and awareness raising activities. Part of the LDI model has also been its ambitios nature, for example setting the goal to clean up a country in one day or cleaning up the whole world in one year.

It seems that whereas in other cases the openness of the LDI model was seen as strength, in the German and Portuguese cases, it was perceived as a weakness. For example in Germany the loose and informal nature of the organisation was experienced as untrustworthy or worrisome by potential partners who expected more structure and certainty. Despite many people using the virtual waste map to map the German garbage-situation, the team did not succeed in involving them as volunteers and team members. Indeed, the German team did not register a legal body for the initative, so the endorsement of the European Parliament was not enough to generate sufficient trust and the team was not professional enough to communicate its messages in a way that would have created more trust. Only in the city of Karlsruhe the volunteers created a legal body and that was also the most successful city in terms of participants, partnerships and visibility (media coverage).

Considering the circumstances across the cases, the keys to success and sustainability of the initiative seem to lay in involving well connected people in the team and engageing top professionals as volunteers for communication and awareness raising activities to build up a wide support network and participant base. Another key to success seems to be professional organisation: making participation easy and comfortable. The two cases that have continued successfully over time were the Estonian and international teams with high capacity in terms of organisation, communication, building

[20] The international team was looking for new coordinators for Portugal and Germany to build up new groups.

partnerships and engaging people in the LDI spirit. In Portugal the initial team was professional and everything went really well, but the rebranding and the new team were unable to keep up the LDI spirit, so the intiative broke down. The coordination became increasingly centralised, open dialogue and communication were lacking, and no stable network was established despite public interest. According to participants this happened because the initiative ran out of the LDI spirit. In Germany the core team did not include well connected professionals and it was also hard to engage them, which meant that the intitiative never really took off, struggling with attempts to convey and explain the LDI spirit.

**A shift in focus from cleaning up physical waste to awareness raising** to change the habit of littering, change the mind-sets and achieve systems change was present in all cases. However, in Estonia this shift took place once the first event managed to dramatically improve the situation, resulting in LDI brainstorming in the following year on coming up with projects on how to improve life in Estonia. Based on feedback and participant numbers both clean-up and brainstorming were continued in the following years. The clean-ups combined with brainstorming and the effect of getting to know one´s neighbours and doing meaningful and necessary things together on a voluntary basis has contributed significantly to the development of a strong and empowered civil society and is directly related to the phenomenon called LDI spirit in this thesis. So the shift in Estonia was much less radical than in Portugal where the physical clean-ups were pretty much discontinued, creating discontent in people who were interested in contiunuing with physical cleanups. Attempts from the organisers to offer environmental education and awareness raising to raise the sense of individual responsibility as the main activity from 2011-2013 were not received well by as people who wanted to feel the empowerment of coming together and making a clearly visible difference in cooperation with other likeminded people. So an important factor in the decline of the Portuguese initiative was the premature and too strict shift from physical clean-ups. As a result of this shift in focus, not having established a community and having alienated the supporters with unresponsive and centralised leadership style causing inner conflicts, the initially highly successful initiative stopped after 2013. In Germany the team tried to start very mildly just asking people to give Germany one hour. Despite the humble approach, it did not work.

**Cooperation and engaging participants and partners**. Social movements often start when people begin cooperating against something or someone. The LDI movement was also born as a Not in My Back Yard (NIMBY) movement, protesting against the excessive amounts of waste produced by the current socio-ecological systems and the underlying wasteful attitudes resulting in littering. The cooperative and constructive nature of the LDI spirit kept the protest from becoming oppositional and helped the movement to develop into a global Yes In My Back Yard (YIMBY) movement aiming to join forces to counteract waste(fullness)and improve local quality of life.

Differently from several ecovillage and transition town cases, the participants did not experience conficts or contradictions between the civil society and governance approaches to sustainable development. It was considered relevant that the civil society mocements speak up to activate the governmental level to search for better solutions for changing the wasteful systems. In all cases, although to a different extent, the initiatives succeeded to secure a cooperative relationship with the governance or local municipality levels. Whereas the cases of other movements mostly cooperated with the local municipal level, the cases on the LDI movement had also developed partnerships with the national and the EU governmentallevels. Whereas the European Parliament endorsed the movement and the Portuguese and Estonian high ranking politicians including government members and presidents participated in cleanup actions, the German case was an exception. There, only in one city the team members built up cooperation with local municipal level that lasted several years. In all locations across Germany the local teams had trouble engaging partners, which could be considered

surprising as Germany is the the biggest case study country best known for its green activism. This also applies in terms of participant numbers. By 2015 a number of EU countries including Sweden, Bulgaria, Italy, Romania, Albania, Ukraine, Hungary, Kosovo, Lithuania and Latvia had managed to engage over 100 000 participants (LDIW 2014), which allows to talk about a significant impact of the movement in these countries. Why did the participation in the otherwise environmentally active Germany remained low, engaging only a couple of hundred people over several years?

One reason was that Germany was already considered green and clean, not needing further cleaning. The German team argued that engaging citizens across Germany was difficult as there are many offers competing for people´s limited time and attention and the individualistic interests are considered more important than community interests nowadays. The team experienced a number of reasons for low participant number including people who did not notice a problem, people who noticed, but had no time or interest to engage, and people who recognised the problem, but were afraid of extra work, competition or that something might go wrong. So it's not that people were not willing to take responsibility, it was more that they had the feeling that they were doig enough already and that Germany was green and clean alrady so no further cleaning was needed. However, Sweden and Austria were also considered clean by its inhabitants, but according to the LDI statistics (LDIW 2014) 700 000 people in Sweden and 46 000 people in Austria had participated in clean-ups, while in Germany this number remained below 400. Further reasons include the low visibility of the initiative, not including professionals to help raise its profile, and attitudes considering cleaning up the responsibility of local municipalities and people who don't pay taxes. In the German case also the argument of competition and fear for extra work surfaced hemming cooperation with local municipalities and waste disposal companies, leading in extreme cases (e.g. in Munich) to banning the cleanup event. In these cases the LDI clean-ups were not seen in a positive light as help from the citizens to manage waste and draw more attention to cleanliness issues by participating in a global campaign, but rather as causes for extra work, competition to the existing cleanup brands or criticism of the current system. Similar problems were recorded also in Slovenia and Romania (LDIW 2014)[21]. As these problems did not surface in other cases, it seems likely that these problems appeared at least partly due to the weakness of the German team that did not succeed to engage enough well connected professionals for successful communication and awareness raising activities. The capacity of the team was relatively low, the initiative remained under the radar and failed to reach wider audience. Perhaps a more professional team would have been able to build up the core team and communicate the LDI model better so that potential participants and partners from municipality and business levels would have sensed an opportunity in participating instead of fear for competition or extra work. All the cases that were successful in terms of engaging people and continuing the initiative on the long-run had engaged well connected people, built up a stable team of more than a handful of people to avoid burnout, and adopted an open and inclusive cooperation and communication approach advised by professional PR people that enabled making the aims more clear and cooperation more appealing. These aspects supported developing a community of likeminded people and creating lasting parterships. The use of internet-based solutions also facilitated building up and maintaining a worldwide virtual LDI-community including a diverse individuals and groups of volunteers.

[21] Slovenia managed to engage over 14% of its population during the 2012 World Cleanup, but experienced lack of support from the governance level that failed to recognise the synergetic win-win potential. The Romanian movement mobilised 1% of the population (ca. 200 000 participants and 1200 volunteers as organisers). The initative was the second biggest civil initiative since the fall of communism in 1989, which worried the national government, so the national intelligence service made organiser profiles, showing traces of historical mistrust to active civil society (Selge 2014).

So it could be said that the experience of LDI movement has shown that having a diverse, professional and well-connected team is one of the keys to success when using this approach. In Germany and Portugal, where the teams were less diverse, professional and well-connected, the initiatives were shorter lived and less successful despite sharing the proactive and ambitious LDI spirit of making a difference for the common good. In Germany the team consisted of students, retired and unemployed persons, several of them foreigners, so the team was not very professional nor well connected and despite efforts, it did not really take off. In Portugal, the core team members were more professional, but the problems leading to the decline and fading of the initially highly successful initiative incuded the lacking openness and inclusiveness in communication and cooperation ("*the organisation lost its LDI spirit*"), coupled with unpopular decision to substitute clean-ups with educational activities.

**Reflection on the SD approach of the LDI cases.** The SD approach of the LDI movement was initially motivated by socio-ecological concern of doing something to change the habit of littering and polluting urban and natural environments. At the time of research, the key to achieving SD was seen to lay in counteracting waste and wastefulness both on the physical plane and on the mindset level. So the SD approach included also social, cultural and economic aspects. The social aspects include bringing people together to facilitate cooperation, empower people and make change possible LDI spirit: raising coherence, strengthening civil society, fostering cooperation, (re)- connecting people. Although not explicitly mentioned, the worldview, or cultural aspect, is considered to hold the key to change as it concerns the way people think. Here changing the mindsets and awareness raising play a relevant part. Economic aspects included systems change towards less wasteful production, consumption and waste management.

The sustainable development concept was considered a difficult one, so less than half of the interview partners had taken time to reflect on it longer – mostly people who had university degrees in biology, urban planning, geology, sociology or similar. The majority of interview partners followed their gut feeling that things are not right and that coming together to reduce waste and wastefulness is the right path towards a better future. So rather than attempting to define how they understand SD, they preferred to bring practical examples of it. In comparison to other CS movements in the sample, the participants of the LDI movement seemed more optimistic about technological solutions as contribution to SD. For instance, in the German context, achieving energy independence and developing innovative technologies such as electric cars "*so that the future generations could also have something from this wealth*" (ED, male, 70s) were seen as keys to intergenerational equity.

Across all cases SD was understood as a long-term perspective, not wasting (using more than you need), disposing of things in a considerate manner and learning from nature. The common trait in the attitude towards the surrounding world could be described as regaining respect. SD was understood as a viable way of doing things over a longer period of time: *"I understand sustainability as a way of living which is able to continue for a very long time seen from the human perspective. It includes how things are done, produced, how to get the food and so on"* (MA, female, 30s). In the Estonian case respect for natural systems and willingness to learn from nature and cooperate with it was stressed more often than in other LDI cases. As one of the original LDI initiators and EE team member, biologist TE put it: *"Sustainability requires learning cooperation from nature and applying this knowledge in designing human systems and society"* (TE, male, 40s).

**The worldview-related aspects of SD.** The roots of the current wasteful way of life were seen to lay in the worldview of separation. The movement hopes to create a change in the mindsets and behavioural systems that would lead to a less wasteful or even zero waste society with proactive empowered people understanding themselves as part of the network of life, not its rulers. In all cases

also inner change, described as awareness change or change of mind-sets or overcoming the worldview of separation was considered highly relevant for making the change towards more sustainable development happen. What is needed for changing the mindsets? First of all raising awareness around waste issues and having a positive alternative vision to change the mindsets (EE, DE, LDI-N). Interestingly, in several cases becoming aware of the waste issues was prompted by intercultural travel experiences. For example, one LDI movement initiator and Estonian team member travelled to Lapland in Northern Finland and was inspired by the respectful attitude to its pristine nature of the locals, inspiring him to take action against littering once he got back home to Estonia. A LDI Germany team member was shocked by the omnipresent garbage while travelling in India and shocked again when he discovered upon return that in Germany the waste-problem also existed, motivating him to take action.

In all cases the positive vision of the Let´s do it! movement was broader than just organising successful clean-ups. Cleaning up was seen as a beginning helping to create networks of people willing to contribute to positive change. However, it was believed that without systemic changes in the way people think and act, the cycles of clean-ups and littering would continue forever. The long-term aim was to draw attention to the problems that the current wasteful way of life is creating and change the mindsets. Having a positive vision and using different methods for awareness raising including broad-based environmental education were seen as the keys for overcoming the separateness and passivity and achieve long-lasting and thorough change. So even though the movement seems to have an ecological focus, analysis shows the relevance of socio-cultural aspects. This is why in all cases a shift in focus from cleaning up to awareness raising and co-creation was made. The positive vision of having no waste at all was believed to be realisable by addressing these immaterial or inner causes for wastefulness. In some cases, e.g. the German initiative, there was a hope that as the physical waste situation was not very bad, the call to cleaning up mental waste could address more people. However, this did not happen, also because the target group was not reached due to lacking capacity of the team.

So although the movement seems very ecologically motivated at the first glance and argues for cleaning up waste and changing the economic systems that perpetuate the wasteful lifestyle, the LDI approach to SD also addresses quite strongly the social and cultural aspects. Indeed, the root causes of wastefulness were seen to lay in the mindsets and habits including wide-spread consumer mentality manifesting in passivity or complacency, caused by the lacking environmental awareness and an underlying worldview of separation. Next to passivity, complacency and ignorance also individualism, fragmentation, fear for extra work and competition were experienced as features of the worldview of separation. Counteracting inner causes of wastefulness and moving towards a worldview of connectedness includes changing values and habits that perpetuate wastefulness. When these causes are dealt with, it becomes possible to adopt an active, responsible stance by citizens and municipalities alike to actively engage in understanding the problems at hand, finding solutions and transforming the wasteful systems. The movement also considered SD education relevant in helping to understand the interconnections and the importance of taking individual responsibility.

**LDI spirit.** Citizens and municipalities were considered too passive and/or complacent with the current situation across all cases. In the case of Germany also competitiveness emerged as a factor hemming cooperation and synergy between the civil society initiatives, municipalities and companies. Such qualities along with lacking capacity or will to cooperate were seen as results of the worldview of separation characterising the current consumer mentality. People are used to paying for the services instead of becoming active themselves. Especially in Germany people expected to have trash cleaned up for them because they pay high taxes – so they tended to shift the responsibility for making a difference to somebody else. Across all cases the movement succeeded to activate the municipalities in waste issues to a bigger or lesser extent.

The Let´s do it spirit spirit was considered necessary to realise this positive vision of a cleaner and less wasteful way of life. It also acted as glue binding diverse volunteers into a (virutal) worldwide community. At the time of research, “LDI spirit” was not a formal concept. This expression was used by almost all interview partners to signify the open, positive, proactive and inclusive cooperative attitude of volunteerism characterised by respect for nature and willingness to take responsibility in order to counteract waste and wastefullness. For many members of the initiative LDI spirit also signified recreating community. Differently from the slogan “Just do it” well-known from sports, the “Let´s do it!” slogan of the movement indicates group activity, the relevance of getting things done together, in cooperation. Interestingly it was suggested that the LDI spirit, occasionally also called the spirit of transition, is the same across grassroots movements. This “spirit” acts as glue and driving force that strengthenes local civil society and communities and supports the development of local leaders.

**Systems change.** The current way of living, producing and consuming is believed to rely on unsustainable systems characterised as careless, resource intensive, wasteful, polluting and competitive. The movement aims to promote intelligent and sustainable waste management principles to ensure a cleaner and more sustainable future by rethinking what is trash and how it could be avoided. Once the people have started to change their mindsets, inspired by a positive, realistic alternative vision of a more sustainable, resource sparing and less wasteful way of life, and supported by a network of likeminded people around them, a systems change is considered possible. One part of this change has to do with the willingness to use less for the greater good, which might be described as a voluntary shift towards a simpler life. As a German team member described it: "*So I drive my car only when it is necessary. Even to my holidays I go with my bicycle. This is sustainability to me that I allow myself less luxury than I actually financially could, let's put it that way"* (ED, male, 70s). Using less than would be possible in the interest of the common good on the expense of individual comfort is an example of a shift in the mindsets, which paves way for the behavioural shift. Further aspects are non-violence and cooperative nature – it is believed that the new systems should be based on cooperation instead of competition and seek to benefit a wider circle of societal actors than thus far, doing it in a non-violent manner. The roots of reckless waste(fullness) are seen to lay in the worldview of separation. The wasteful attitude could be described as serving individual convenience while not knowing or not wanting to consider the consequences of our daily choices. Such problematic thinking can be described as mental waste that also needs to be cleaned up. So it is suggested that a systems change towards SD requires both physical as well as mental cleanups.

**Summary of the core themes and categories of the LDI cases**

All cases considered the wasteful way of life common to the capitalist consumer societies the main problem and cause for the sustainability crisis. Further, mistakes in mindsets and outer systems were considered relevant. The mistakes of inner systems or mindsets included the worldview of separation characterised by lacking environmental awareness, the tendency of not taking responsibility and passive, individualistic consumer society. The mistakes in outer systems include inadequate waste disposal systems, fear for competition, lacking will and/or capacity of municipalities for change, the tendency to compete rather than cooperate and vague responsibility.

**Table 26. LDI cases: core themes and categories for moving towards SD.**

| LDI | Core theme | Core categories with key properties |
|---|---|---|
| **EE** | **Counteracting waste** | **Positive vision:** rethinking waste, reducing waste(fullness), empowering for change<br>**LDI spirit**: proactive attitude, open cooperation, recreating community<br>**Systems change:** awareness raising, synergetic partnerships, worldview of connectedness |
| **DE** | **Counteracting complacency** | **Making a difference:** positive vision, cleaning up, overcoming fragmentation<br>**LDI spirit:** taking responsibility, awareness raising, cooperation<br>**Changing mind-sets:** reflexivity, simpler living, mental waste cleanup |
| **PT** | **Rethinking waste** | **Capacitiy building:** awareness raising, environmental education, changing mindsets<br>**LDI spirit:** taking responsibility, volunteerism, cooperation<br>**Systems change:** stopping waste, strengthening civil society, activating governance |
| **LDIN** | **Counteracting waste(fullness)** | **Changing mindsets:** a doable model for change, awareness raising, accessible communication, mutual learning<br>**LDI spirit:** taking responsibility, empowering, inclusive cooperation, creating community<br>**Systems change:** positive vision, pollution reduction, healthy planet, mental & physical cleanup |
| **SUM** | **Counteracting waste(fullness)** | **Changing mind-sets/ positive vision, LDI spirit, systems change** |

The core themes of the LDI cases were counteracting waste (EE), counteracting complacency (DE), rethinking waste (PT) and counteracting waste(fullness) (LDI-N). The core theme was across all cases related to counteracting both material and immaterial issues causing excessive waste(fullness). The core category of the LDI-N sums this content up in the most comprehensive way so it can be used as the core category of all the LDI cases. Counteracting waste(fullness) is the core solution for changing the wasteful way of life and achieving more sustainable human development. How to achieve this?

Despite different local circumstances and loose nature of the LDI model, the core categories were strikingly similar across the cases. What differed was the order of core categories and the order of aspects considered in different cases under different categories. For example, in the German and LDI-N cases the first property of the systems change was positive vision, while in the Estonian case the positive vision was the first core concept and in the Portuguese case it was the property of the first core code capacity building. Despite such variations, essentially three core categories emerged in the analysis: changing the mindsets, LDI spirit and systems change.

Wheather the change in the desired direction starts from systems change, with in turn starts from having a positive vision (which is considered its precondition) or from having a positive vision including rethinking what is waste and raising awareness of the alternatives to change the mindsets, in the middle in each case LDI spirit, characterised by recreating community, taking responsibility and engaging in open cooperation were considered necessary.

To ensure a more sustainable development, the LDI movement has a threefold aim: reducing waste, activating people and creating awareness for a systems change towards more sustainable ways of living. This involves reducing waste and pollution by changing the wasteful ways of thinking and behaving and making systematic changes in production, consumption and disposal practices. In less than a decade the LDI movement spread across the world and developed from a local NIMBY campaign into an international YIMBY movement joining millions of people into a loose community based on a positive vision of a clean world, shared environmental responsibility, and empowering LDI spirit characterised by the willingness to cooperate to make a difference and counteract waste and wastefulness on the level of mindsets as well as societal systems.

# 4.2. Governance level case studies

Here the results of the analysis of the governmental approaches to SD at the national levels in Estonia, Germany and Portugal and on the EU level are analysed. Data grounding this analysis consists of the respective sustainable development strategies (SDS-s), their reviews and progress reports, but also texts from their official SD-related websites, expert interviews with high-ranking strategy officials, doctoral memos, and to a smaller degree, extant literature. The interviews and website texts provided more up-to-date insights into the current developments. The case study accounts begin with an overview of perceived problems causing unsustainability and end with a discussion of the perceived solutions based on core temes and concepts of each case.

## 4.2.1. Estonian case study

**Main challenges.** The shrinking population was considered the major problem for Estonian long-term sustainable development. With only 1.3 million people Estonian population is very small even in the European context. This is why the low birth rate, also problematic in most other EU countries, threatens the survival of Estonian culture and nation and thus, the long-term sustainability of Estonia.

The interviewed experts considered this concern for survival the main reason why ensuring cultural viability assumed such a high priority in Estonian national sustainable development strategy (NSDS) Sustainable Estonia 21 (SE21). The pressure of cultural globalization was considered problematic as this can lead to too rapid internationalization of Estonian cultural space, leading to English becoming the prevailing language in several spheres of life, threatening to turn the Estonian language and culture into museum items. Inability to preserve cultural viability would thus result in loss of identity and waning of Estonian culture and nation. As an expert from Statistics Estonia put it: the consistently negative trends of indicators reflecting the number of carriers of Estonian culture suggest that it may be a challenge to preserve the cultural space, and consequently achieve other SD aims (Oras et al. 2015: 80).

According to SE21 continuing on the low interference business-as usual development path constituted another central obstacle to sustainable development of Estonia. It was argued that its liberal market- and individual-centred social arrangements characterised by low state interference ensured economic success and capacity building in the transition period of 1990s and 2000nds. The experts agreed that continuing on the business-as usual development path, destructive towards social coherence, would not ensure long-term sustainability for Estonia.

Further problems included the slow growth in welfare compared to the quality of life of many other EU countries. Coupled with the lack of good employment options this difference in the quality of life has encouraged work migration, problematic for a country with a small and reducing population. Another challenge was that Estonian economy was rather energy-intensive and polluting due to still relying much on oil-shale, resulting in threats to losing biodiversity and ecological balance.

In addition to these challenges listed in the national SD strategy and other relevant documents, the interviews revealed further problems including slow pace of change due to vagueness and change of priorities resulting from the economising turn. The main reason for the vagueness is that although SE21 was set out as a long-term strategy until 2030, no implementation plan was made. So even though the SD vision of SE21 is rhetorically well argued for, its abstract, non-binding nature and lacking implementation plan have hindered its practical application. Both interviewed experts argued that the strategy remained too abstract and vague, even academic for many people. Indeed, with references to Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Manuel Castells (SE21 2005: 4-5), the SE21 resembles in part an academic discussion of future scenarios than a national development strategy to

be applied. Another example of the vagueness of the NSDS is that measuring transition to knowledge society would require measuring growth beyond GDP, but how exactly this could be made is not clear. One expert argued that the success of Estonia 2020 strategy lays in it being a short-term development plan for ten years with easily graspable indicators and goals, instead of a vague long-term strategy for 25 years (OE, female, 40s).

**Solutions for achieving sustainable development: core theme and categories**

In terms of finding the core theme of the Estonian case study, the situation seems more ambiguous than in Portuguese and German cases. The SE21 suggests that for achieving SD the complex task of catching up with the EU quality of life while preserving Estonian cultural space, significantly increasing social coherence and ensuring ecological balance has to be mastered. This is considered possible, but not by continuing on the business-as-usual development path (SE21 2005: 36). The business-as-usual development direction characterised by the liberal market- and individual-centred social arrangements and low state interference was useful in the 1990s during the reorganisation period from a communist to a capitalist system. However, it is considered destructive to social coherence, so the experts behind SE21 suggested that for ensuring long-term sustainability a paradigm shift towards knowledge society is needed[22]. However, as this shift has succeeded only partially. Although the SE21 criticised staying on the business-as-usual development path already back in 2005, it was still going strong in Estonia ten years after the strategy was adopted (Oras 2011, Oras 2012, Oras et al 2015). So although the quality of life had generally been improving, various indicators showed that the overall improvements remained limited and Estonia had more or less the same ranking among the EU countries as ten years ago (Oras et al. 2015: 72). Hence it was estimated that if the country continues on the beaten path, the chances of achieving sustainable development by 2030 as planned in SE21 were slim. It is reinforced by an unforeseen shift in focus towards green growth that happened around 2010. An Estonian expert described this economising turn as a result of developments on the EU level: the cooling interest of the EU in SD progress reviews and updates produced a similar cooling down effect in Estonia (TE, female, 30s). Consequently the self-correction mechanisms envisioned in SE21 stopped functioning and relevant updates, such as including climate change issues into the strategy, were not undertaken. So although the SE21 is officially running until 2030, the Estonian government structures have followed the EU de facto economising turn and stopped producing the bi-annual SDS reviews (although the statistics was still gathered). Following the lead of the EU, it is claimed also in Estonia that the NSDS strategy has been mainstreamed into the Estonia 2020 strategy. This has resulted in prioritisation of green growth rhetoric of raising competitiveness and creating jobs, leading to narrowing of the SD-perception (OE, female, 40s). Knowledge society and green growth are different development goals. So the core theme of this case has to do with the on-going paradigm shift from the business-as-usual approach towards knowledge society. This shift is considered necessary for Estonia in SE21 for achieving SD by 2030. However, considering both rhetoric and practices, the Estonian SD-approach cannot be summed up as "paradigm shift to knowledge society" as this would mean oversimplifying and idealising the actual situation, which is much more vague and fragmented. As the following discussion of the core concepts exemplifies, the situation in Estonia is between the ideal knowledge society and the current business-as-usual development path.

[22] Also network society was suggested as an alternative in SE21, but as achieving it was considered too lengthy, knowledge society was seen as the only viable option for achieving SD of Estonia by 2030.

What does the ideal knowledge society development path involve? Knowledge society is understood as a self-reflexive and self-corrective development model capable of multiplying collective intellect and competence:

> *"Knowledge society is the only development model based on reflective knowledge-based adaptation of the society and state to changes in both the internal and external environment, creating the necessary structures (institutional and intellectual support to strategic planning) and cultivating reflexivity and competence as the central qualities of the society"* (SE21 2005: 54).

What is needed for achieving knowledge society? A pragmatic condition is the change of generations in the key sectors of society. The emergence of new elite is believed to facilitate adopting new societal attitudes and policies, increasing the reflexivity and cooperation capacity of the society. Reflexivity is an important prerequisite as it allows developing a better understanding of the processes and prepares ground for open public discussions and dialogue. Emphasis on reflexivity and reaching a societal agreement through a broad public discussion between different societal groups are seen as crucial preconditions for moving towards knowledge society (SE21 2005: 54). Building the capacity to be reflexive also helps to develop efficient societal correction mechanisms. Without adequate reflection and feedback systems, the knowledge society would remain an illusion. Development of these is still work in progress in Estonia.

The paradigm shift to knowledge society also presupposes new behavioural strategies for successful performance in a global risk society. Suggested strategies include dispersed responsibility, independent expertise centres, increased networking between experts and interest groups and the spread of innovation capacity. The shift also requires taking much more responsibility than so far for the results of our actions and the harmonious management of ecosystems both as individuals and society at large. The shift involves also seeing humans as interconnected part of the ecosystem. This implies something interesting: that in the business-as-usual approach the humans are not seen as part of the ecosystem, but somehow separate of it. The NSDS points out that the shift to knowledge society also requires reforms in education as well as in the culture and practice of state governance for developing a steady partnership between the state and a well-developed civil society. A success criterion for measuring change in these areas was that more power and money are invested in the well-informed preparation of political decisions, not in dealing with the consequences of incorrect decisions (damage reduction). This would also mean adopting rational knowledge-based management principles in governance, public and private sectors, subjecting political decisions to rational calculation and feedback-based analysis, incorporating competent expertise and publicised feedback into governance for detecting and correcting mistakes and dangerous trends, and incorporating corrections proceeding from development needs into decisions independent from party and group interests. These developments take time and so far, the processes have been relatively slowly developing in Estonia.

Developing information and communication technology (ICT) based e-solutions form a part of moving towards knowledge society. Estonia has been successful in developing ICT-based solutions in areas like e-governance, e-voting, e-health care, e-taxes, mobile parking, or e-school, providing flexible access, improving transparency and facilitating information exchange. However, achieving knowledge society cannot be reduced to computerisation or digitalisation. The development of innovative ICT solutions on its own is not enough; it needs to support a paradigm change towards a principally different arrangement of society and governance. Although the ICT solutions have significantly facilitated communication between the state and the civil society, much still needs to be done.

In terms of education and research it is argued that the national policy has to start promoting and supporting them much more as sources for innovation and development. Indeed education, research, innovation and development were described as the key spheres of the knowledge society.

The need to invest more in education is regarded as "knowledge investment". Bridging the gap between the "knowledge-poor" and the "knowledge-rich", with particular attention paid to the continuous development of the working skills and competences of people in all age groups builds capacities and ensures equal opportunities. Thus, the contribution of education to a knowledge-driven development is inseparable from the value of education for individuals and the overall development of the society. Given the negative demographic trends in the whole Europe, there is a need to stay longer in employment and maintain the quality of workforce for a longer period. Older age groups should be engaged in various forms of lifelong learning, including retraining. Key competencies for the knowledge society include digital literacy, learning skills, social competences, business competences and language skills. Investment in research and education were regarded as keys to raising societal innovation potential. Acquiring these key competences in all age groups, including those with higher social and unemployment risk, has been the main aim of lifelong learning. The growth of knowledge and raise in well-educated people are valued as development resource with national priority helping to move towards more rational and informed decision-making. Lifelong learning approach enables maximising the creativity and learning ability of individuals, shaping strategic thinking, reflexivity, cooperation ability and risk assessment for solving problems.

Bearing in mind the small population of Estonia, the national SD approach aims to ensure the survival of the nation. For that, it is deemed that Estonia needs to catch up with the EU quality of life to minimise work related emigration (SE21 2005: 36). Raising the quality of life and welfare in Estonia is considered crucial for keeping capable people from leaving Estonia and maintaining demographic viability. The key to raising the quality of life is seen to lay in increasing economic wealth by fostering competition which stimulates innovation to produce more effectively and ensure good employment options. Achieving fiscal sustainability is also a relevant goal, and Estonia has done well in the EU context in this perspective.

An unusual aspect of Estonian SD-approach is that while achieving growth of welfare, coherent society and ecological balance are the staple parts of sustainable development models, ensuring cultural viability is a rather unique priority among NSDS-s. The interviewed experts considered this concern for survival the main reason why ensuring cultural viability assumed such a high priority in Estonian NSDS Sustainable Estonia 21 (SE21). Inability to preserve cultural viability would thus result in loss of identity, language and waning of Estonian culture and nation. The relevance of ensuring cultural viability is described already in the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia from 1992, listing "*the preservation of the Estonian people, the Estonian language and the Estonian culture*" among its main aims (Constitution of the Republic of Estonia 1992). The expert from the Government office commented that the preservation of Estonian people and culture has been as painfully relevant through history as it is today not only due to small and declining population, but also due to a relatively high proportion of non-Estonians living in Estonia without knowing the language and culture, which form the basis for Estonian identity (TE, female, 30s). The specific Estonian context is also described in SE21:

> *"The goal related to cultural space was set due to the particularity of Estonia – the historical experience, small society and limited state resources, which all makes this goal substantiated and also indispensable in the very context of sustainability, along with the above-noted fact that it is just the developments in cultural space that provide the best support (or hindrance) to the achievement of the other goals"* (SE21 2005: 35).

Ensuring cultural viability is considered to involve preservation of culture and language while being open to diversity and change and increasing participation in culture. In terms of cultural viability there are both positive and negative trends. The population trend is negative, as well as the fact that too

many material heritage sites are not in good condition. However, the consumption of culture has been raising, for example the amount of people visiting museums and libraries. One of the main threats to Estonian sustainable development according to the NSDS was which might lead to too rapid internationalization of Estonian cultural space. One way of counteracting the pressure of cultural globalization and ensure cultural viability is raising the attractiveness of Estonia as a living and working place for the young people is broadening Estonian cultural space by increasing its functionality and innovative quality by using interactive media.

The SE21 argues that ensuring national sustainability requires a coherent society with broad intellectual and social support for knowledge society (SE21 2005: 64). Such social support requires well-functioning cooperation and feedback systems. This, in turn requires developing a culture of cooperation. For that the support of the so-called leading elite is needed, meaning groups and individuals interested and willing to give their personal contribution to the design and realisation of the "project" of knowledge society (SE21 2005: 79). This can be done by supporting public discussion on relevant societal issues and provide more support and legitimacy for decisions pertaining to critical societal problems and decisions. Coherent society is understood as an open society. So an urgent need for increasing openness for public discussion was seen in order to overcome the resistance and round-defence among politicised officials and ensure that relevant proposals and ideas are seriously considered and implemented. This can also be supported by the use of media for development debates helping to increase open critical reflection capacity of people and institutions. Also supporting education, research, development and innovation activities help to increase intellectual capacity. The interviewed experts estimated that civil society participation has been strong in the transition process, which shows progress towards increasing social coherence. A positive example of the developing cooperation culture is the way that the civil society and governance level have cooperated in introducing the LDI World Cleanup idea at the Rio+20 conference, where the campaign was included as part of Estonian official presence in Rio as an exemplary case civil initiative export. However, work needs to be done towards securing equal opportunities and eliminating stratification. For eliminating stratification, enabling equal access to education and lifelong learning are considered vital, but also creating jobs and ensuring good employment options. Knowledge society presupposes informedness of all members of society and their engagement in discussions, which will activate contacts between the users of the Estonian language and facilitate the development of new meanings within different spheres and in their contact areas. For eliminating stratification special programs for offsetting regional developmental differences and mobilisation of additional resources for strengthening of local communities were planned. Securing equal opportunities can be fostered by counteracting the digital and cultural gap between different generations and groups of society to avoid marginalisation. Furthermore, more attention to communication strategies for overcoming interpersonal, inter-sectoral and professional communication barriers was suggested as a way to facilitate transformation.

Respecting the fundamental principle of ecological balance has been another development priority. Next to the cultural challenges also the introduction of a combined conception of nature as a value and a central development resource of the society is considered one of the key challenges for SD. From this perspective, the main function of environmental protection is to achieve harmonious and balanced management of resources and the natural environment in the interests of the Estonian society (Estonian Ministry of Environment 2014). The need to change the perception of human-nature relations is part of the solution in the SE21, stating that the success of the knowledge society as the development path of Estonia is dependent on decisions based on knowledge of the laws of nature and on comprehensive databases. The latter allow the assessment of the functioning and viability of the natural environment as an integral system and its individual components. The need to strive for continuous ecological balance in a real economic environment was emphasised, which could be

realised through promoting the unity of the use and protection of nature as the mutually complementary sides of a unitary process, with humans regarded as part of the ecosystem. This reflects the highly responsible role of a human individual and the human society, as they have to assume responsibility for the harmonious management of ecosystems and respect the fundamental principle of ecological balance. Achieving or maintaining ecological balance includes efficient use of both renewable and non-renewable resources, lessening environmental pollution and improving waste management, all of which help to maintain biological diversity. A good example in pollution and waste reduction efforts is the state cooperation with the LDI-movement. Efficient resource use was also an aim for energetics and transport sectors.

**Economizing and globalizing turns.** As a result of the economic crisis in the second half of 2000nds, and the developments on the EU governance level, an economising turn took place in Estonia at the end of the first decade of the 2000nds. The aim is to increase the quality of life by increasing economic wealth, competitiveness, innovation capacity, productivity and efficiency. Thus a clear change of narrative took place from the SE21 aim of achieving knowledge society to aiming for green growth. One negative effect of this shift is narrowing the broader development perspective that the SE21 had by prioritising the economic development perspective.

Despite the lack of implementation plan or renewals of SE 21, the sustainable development agenda of Estonia is running until 2030 and is argued to be implemented further through different sectorial strategies and development plans, including the Estonia 2020 strategy. The experts commented (TE, female, 30s, OE, female, 40s) that SD-considerations have become part of policy-making and planning activities in Estonia, regulated by the SD-law, even if the SD concept is not used any more to describe these developments. The argument is that SD remains the overarching development goal of Estonia – it is just not so relevant in the short-term, where raising competitiveness and economic growth have become top priorities. The logic behind this is that raising the quality is believed to happen by increasing economic wealth by fostering competition which stimulates innovation to produce more effectively. As the Estonia 2020 strategy is much closer to the current business-as-usual development path, it has been easier to grasp and apply than to transition towards knowledge society as the NSDS envisioned. So the green growth focus can be described as a greened version of the business-as-usual approach.

Although many local SD aims were not reached, another shift in focus in SD rhetoric and actions from local to global level took place. Since about 2010 the relevance of the integrated SD-approach and the urgency of sustainability transition have been expressed mainly in relation to the international level. The Estonian government level has been quite pleased with local developments. In the context of the Rio+20 conference in 2012, the then Estonian foreign minister Urmas Paet commented boldly that whereas the world is currently on a non-sustainable path, Estonia is well on its way with its SD goals set until 2030 and many successful e-solutions to support these developments (Estonian Foreign Ministry 2012a). Thus, the Estonian governance level has continued to talk about the necessity of a stronger political commitment to SD, meaning primarily strengthening competitiveness, resource efficiency, economic viability and international development cooperation.

To sum up, following can be said (Oras et al. 2015): the development goals were reached in some areas, e.g. education and renewable energy. Ecological balance also shows positive trends. Trends in quality of life, equal opportunities, and security are also positive, but still a little below the EU average. However, Estonian energy production continues to have a high environmental impact and economy is in general is rather energy-intensive. Despite the economic crisis, the economic indicators show an increase in wellbeing in Estonia and the national fiscal indicators are among the top countries.

Considering the above said, ensuring survival of Estonian nation and culture can is the central development task, but there are two main ways of achieving it. Striving towards knowledge society is the ideal long-term direction, described in the NSDS as the only way for Estonia to achieve SD by 2030. However, the business-as-usual approach is closer to practiced reality and has been strengthened by the EU-wide economising turn. So it could be argued that an adjusted business-as-usual approach is the realistic development direction with attempts of turning it towards knowledge society. So the core theme of this case is "between business-as-usual and knowledge society". The core categories are knowledge society, ensuring survival and economising turn.

Table 27 below provides an overview of the core theme, categories and key properties.

**Table 27. Core theme and categories of the Estonian case.**

| Between business-as-usual and knowledge society | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Knowledge society** | **Ensuring survival** | **Economising turn** |
| Generation change | Demographic viability | Green growth |
| Reflexivity and responsibility | Growth of welfare | Adjusted business-as-usual approach |
| Societal agreement | Cultural viability | Increasing competitiveness |
| Knowledge based governance | Social coherence | Internationalizing SD |
| Lifelong learning | Respecting ecological balance | Narrowing the SD perspective |

Compared to the knowledge society aim, the current aims of raising prodctivity, employment and economic growth were closer to the greened business as usual approach, which was also more easily understandable, more concrete and more easily applicable.

The Estonian narrative spoke about being in between business as usual and the ideal knowledge society development model. Ensuring survival of the nation and culture was the main aim with turning towards reflexive and responsible knowledge society or staying with the adjusted business-as-usual approach characterised by the economising turn two development paths that were pursued in parallel.

## 4.2.2. German case study

**Main challenges.** In 2012 the German national SD report concluded that the politicians and society alike will have to make further major changes if sustainability targets are to be realised (The Federal Government of Germany 2012). Among the major problem areas were the educational and mobility sectors, inequality and responsibility issues, and the need to change old structures insufficient to meet the pressing challenges. It was argued that technology and technological innovation are not enough to solve the sustainability crises. Also changes in the educational system were considered necessary, as too few foreign children and young people were leaving the schools and universities with qualification, which can perpetuate inequality in the situation where a significant deficit was already perceived in inter- and intragenerational equity. Another example of intragenerational equity challenge was the need to close the gender payment gap. The need to take national and international responsibility was considered one of the biggest challenges. This involved putting NSDS-s to practice to give the developing world a clear signal that sustainable economy is possible and deserves to be strived towards. In terms of transport guaranteeing environmentally just mobility was seen as a challenge in the light of the intensity of goods and passenger traffic. Further problem areas included progress towards more efficient use of energy in service of climate protection, and producing and eating healthily to achieve the situation where consumers act as the driving force for structural change. To maintain global competitiveness, an emphasis was laid ensuring economic innovation.

Whereas the state capacity could be considered good and there was general acceptance of the relevance of the SD issues, the expert commented that horizontal cooperation among stakeholders was in need of improvement. In the field of social coherence also dealing with demographic change and ageing population were pressing challenges for Germany. Finding solutions to demographic situation included the challenge of finding good ways to transition into the third age of life.

In addition to challenges described in the official documents, the interviews with the EU and national experts brought out further problem areas. These all were related to Germany´s commitment to SD agenda and can be summed up as concern for lacking commitment from partners, worry about disintegrated approach to SD and shift from long-term planning to short-term goals. The concern for lacking commitment from partners had its roots in the fact that the German NSDS and related policies were designed in line with the EU SDS. This vision of mutually complementing and reinforcing strategies made it difficult for Germany to accept that the EU SDS does not exist as a standalone strategy anymore and made them push for its renewal. In the words of the EU expert:

> *"And this is actually something, which is a bit problematic for instance for Germany and some other member states that they have built much of their environmental policy in reference to the EU SDS, while in the EU it has become vague. /…/ Now I don't know, and I frankly don't think the attempts for renewal will succeed, but it is every now and then still brought into the picture by Germany, for example"* (CE, female, 40s).

The unsuccessful attempts of the German representatives to advocate for renewing the EU SDS and to committing to the integrated SD-approach indicate worry about the developments. The German SD-expert commented that it was not easy to agree that SD has been mainstreamed in Europe and found the increasing economic focus undermining the integrative SD concept and strategy worrying (RG, male, 50s). Indeed, in addition to the shift in focus towards green economy and green growth, also a shift from long-term to short-term goals could be perceived on the EU level and in its member states. Even though these developments were considered problematic, the expert admitted that no alternative was seen to green growth at the governance level.

**Solutions for achieving sustainable development: core theme and concepts**

The core theme of the German approach to SD is committed co-creation of good life. This means that according to the German SD perception, all members of the society are considered equally responsible for achieving sustainable development. It is recognised that the government and municipalities cannot impose SD unilaterally from above, and that SD can emerge only as a result of joint efforts. SD is understood as an urgent collaborative and participatory task that can be achieved by taking responsibility on individual and collective levels to co-create good quality of life for the present and future generations. Responsible and informed co-creation is seen as a process that leads to innovation.

What is needed for achieving continuing co-creation of good quality of life in the face of worrying lack of persistence and commitment from partners? Taking responsibility is deemed necessary for achieving SD in Germany as a cross-cutting aim. It involves ensuring inter- and intragenerational equity, increasing the quality of life and social cohesion while protecting the climate, conserving nature and using the resources sparingly. It includes also following certain management rules for sustainability and not only on the governance level. The role of governance is seen as the provider of the legal framework enabling sustainability to be integrated into all areas of life as. To achieve the required change it is mandatory that also the business and third sector consider SD as a guiding principle and a benchmark when making decisions. It is one of the cornerstones of the German national SD-approach that SD is not considered only the task of the state but also a task for society as a whole (DE SDS 2002: 162). All are responsible for setting goals for reducing energy consumption

and the emission of greenhouse gases, as without the active engagement of industry, commerce and consumers the goals cannot be achieved.

The German SD approach includes taking both personal and collective responsibility, but achieving SD is considered a collective task. So divided responsibility across societal players is the decisive aspect. It is maintained that only if the goals are accepted as guidelines for action by each person within their own sphere of responsibility, by political leaders at all governmental levels including federal states and municipalities, businesses and trade unions as well as private citizens, then together it will be possible to achieve SD. This also means that everyone should have the chance of taking charge of their own life and other people, and of living in a healthy and safe environment embedded in a network of social relationships. Taking responsibility means bearing all levels from personal to national and global responsibility in mind when making decisions and helping to fight poverty and unsustainable use of environmental resources worldwide. Taking global responsibility also means promoting development while supporting nature protection. It is acknowledged that a successful implementation of the NSDS by developed countries would improve the situation of the developing countries as well. The responsibility of the industrial nations in realising their NSDS-s lays also in proving that it is possible to link sustainable economics with successful economic development: *"A national strategy bringing together economic, ecological and social dimensions in an integrated vision, and succeeding in practice, would also exercise great appeal internationally"* (DE SDS 2002: 3). Thus the German SD-approach reflects a global sense of responsibility fuelled by the insight that their patterns of production and consumption, and use of resources have direct consequences on the global availability of natural resources and development opportunities in other countries.

The SD transformation is seen as a participatory, on-going process of responding to challenges since: *"It goes without saying that such a strategy is never finalised, but rather it must be adapted to new times and new priorities. We require intensive social dialogue on how we wish to live in the future, how we wish to respond in trade and industry and in society to the challenges of the globalised world"* (DE SDS 2002: 3). The German SD-process can be characterised as a gradual learning-by-doing process with next steps based on reflection of the progress so far. SD is understood as a gradual long-term process and the German approach puts this understanding also into practice. An example of this reflexive and thorough way of approaching SD is the way the German governmental level initiated the first pilot projects for optimisation of economic, ecological and social interests to gain practical experiences in parallel to developing the first NSDS in the early 2000nds. The relevance of long-term planning in SD-issues is that it supports the consistent implementation of the chosen development directions and can thus yield better fruits than an inconsistent approach. The expert RG commented that the German persistence of sticking to plans and following the rules stems from the Prussian cultural heritage (RG, male, 50s).

Differently from the trend of dropping the SD agenda among EU member states, the German approach exhibits a continuing commitment to the SD goals. Research has shown that the level of general awareness of the SD issues has been on the rise regarding the level of interest and market share in ethical and organic products, as well as the level of knowing the SD concept (BMU 2010)[23]. As the expert RG put it: *"There is no question as to whether or not there is a need for sustainable development – sustainability is here to stay in German political and societal life as an accepted goal across all party lines" (male, 50s).* The commitment to the SD cause is also exemplified by the fact that the German government level has been producing relatively regular reviews and since the NSDS

[23] Representative survey on environmental awareness and behaviour conducted by Trendbüro among 1,000 people was published on the BMU website in September 2010.

was first adopted in April 2002 (for more details, see 3.3.2.3). The strategy has been continuously monitored, and if needed, adjusted, to fit the current developments walking the talk on SD efforts (The Federal Government of Germany 2007). So in this case the management rules for SD aiming to ensure ecologically, economically and socially well-balanced development programme are followed (DE SDS 2002: 323), as the strategy has developed further along with its indicators and targets, and the updated ideas are put into practice.

Creative vision is the second core category of the German case. *S*D is understood as a task that challenges the creative potential of the society, leading to reconsidering values, social models and cultural traditions that are not bringing good results to leave the beaten track and finding new directions. Similarly to the Estonian NSDS also here the cultural aspects are considered relevant as influencers of processes facilitating or hindering SD. Creativity serves as the key to innovation which is seen as the driving force of sustainability, and sustainability, in turn, is considered to be the driving force of innovation and creativity. SD is not considered simply a technocratic route to a better life, but a collaborative, participatory and social co-creative process that requires a creative vision of the future. Technical innovations are considered important, but not sufficient on their own to act as the driving force. Less political regulation and control in details is regarded another key to creativity and innovation. It is suggested that the old perception of "hard" innovation as technological progress will be increasingly complemented by "soft" innovation factors such as optimal communication, development of networks, raising the qualification and motivation of co-workers, as well as supporting science and research. These "proactive" innovation modes will serve as the precondition for economic success in turbulent times. The NSDS stresses that SD requires an imaginative and creative vision of *"how we want to live in the future"* which can develop as a result of an intensive social dialogue. (DE SDS 2002). The strength of German national SD approach is that it does not oversimplify the complexity of the matter as can sometimes be observed in the technology-focused governance cases.

Creative vision and proactive innovation modes contribute to raising the quality of life and help to develop the culture of sustainability. Culture of sustainability involves immaterial aspects like values and attitudes towards what is good life and what is our relation to nature. The concept of culture does not belong to priority areas in the NSDS. In German SD-rhetoric "culture" occurs more frequently in the form of agri- or aquaculture than on its own, but the concepts of "culture of sustainability", "culture of responsibility" and "participation culture" have been used as means for achieving the desired transition towards more sustainable development. The relevance of culture was brought up during consultations for preparing the strategy by participating social groups. Consequently, cultural aspects are included in the articulation of the German SD-model and described in a special subchapter under the second aim "Quality of life" of the NSDS. The phrase "culture of sustainability" is used once in the 2012 progress report, stating the SD *"…requires a culture of sustainability, which should help close the gap between knowledge and action. It is a question of determining which values are important to us … and how we define satisfaction and reputation in an era in which we know that resources are limited"* (Federal Government of Germany 2012a: 21). Thus the concept of culture of sustainability is connected with fostering behavioural and value change necessary for finding innovative ways of defining well-being, life satisfaction and reputation in SD. When asked about the relevance of culture in the German approach to SD, the expert RG pointed to the deep historical roots of nature protection ethics in Germany stretching back to romanticism. Nature protection ethics is considered to be a culturally relevant matter that has helped to prepare ground for the broad acceptance of SD: *"Germans have been reconnecting with and saving nature since romanticism, resulting in a kind of perceived cultural ethics that has helped the sustainable development ideas to gain ground"* (male, 50s). The nature protection ethics thus forms a part of

culture of sustainability, and includes a reflexive and responsible attitude when developing urban and rural areas while protecting the environment and enjoying nature. However, the expert pointed out that culture of sustainability is still something that needs to be developed (RG, male, 50s).

As SD requires taking an active part in shaping the continuing structural changes in society and economy, the precondition to achieving this is the ability to deal with the rapidly growing knowledge, new technologies, and changing working and living relationships, and filter the important information, evaluate and apply it. As there is no ready-made universal formula for SD, and it can only be shaped through a constant process of searching, learning and experience, education, science and research are considered essential for working out visions, propose aims, identify suitable measures and develop technical innovations. Indeed, knowledge has been considered the most important resource for sustainable development (DE SDS 2002: 270). Education, science and research are considered "soft" innovation factors. Education reform is seen as a key to changing old structures and developing new ideas to shape the direction of change and ensure spiritual and economic vitality of the society. In line with Estonian and Portuguese NSDS-s where the concept of "knowledge society" had a significant role, the German NSDS uses the concept of "learning society" (DE SDS 2002: 268). Goals related to education and research stretch from pre-school to adult learning and include facilitating access to good education and training, improving vocational training and fostering life-long learning. To popularise these goals, the German government declared 2012 the science year of sustainability. Additionally, the need for new, participative education methods were expressed to make learning more attractive and effective, and connect the contents more with real life. Also, the responsibility of adult role models in communicating values that correspond to the SD goals was stressed, as SD-education should aim to develop personality, support participation in society, and increase the capability for employment. In comparison to the other governance strategies, the German strategy is most elaborate about education and research issues, which is perhaps also due to having started with SD-education already back in 2001. Still, as mentioned under challengers, there is also room for improvement, especially in ensuring equal education and lifelong learning opportunities.

**Social cohesion** has been put to the test by the rapid economic structural changes influencing the job market and demanding people to adjust to new circumstances (DE SDS 2002: 29). Increasing social cohesion can take place by initiating societal dialogue and fostering participation culture to ensure that all interest groups are heard and have equal opportunities in the context of rapid demographic changes. Social cohesion helps to reach agreements of joint goals and ways to divide responsibility for achieving these goals. The NSDS estimates that broad participation and solidarity are needed to reinforce social cohesion and achieve SD: *"Public spirit, solidarity and civil courage form the cement of society, from which a culture of mutual recognition can grow. These values are our social asset"* (DE SDS 2002: 33). So in addition to agri- and aquaculture, and culture of sustainability, also participation and mutual recognition culture are thematised in the first German SDS.

Participation culture has key significance in translating the knowledge gained through societal dialogue into action: *"SD cannot simply be enacted by the State. The SD-goal can only be reached if everybody participating in economy and society, from businesses to citizens, take it as their own affair and responsibility,"* as RG expressed it (male, 50s). Since the beginning of government-level actions to achieve SD in Germany, the need for wider participation and urgency of jointly creating sustainability has been stressed. The success is believed to depend on the extent to which participants, and in particular citizens, are fired with enthusiasm for it. Social dialogue is regarded as a way of raising public awareness and finding out *"which future we want"*. The strategy argues that intensive societal dialogue does not stir up fears about the future, but allows releasing creative powers to take new directions and developing together a new contract between the generations. It seems that the

societal dialogue has served well as an awareness raising tool: surveys have shown that the awareness of the SD-concept has more than tripled in Germany rising from 13% in 2000 to 43% in 2010 (BMU 2010). To achieve shared ownership and responsibility for the process a broad range of social groups have been involved in (further) developing the process over the years.

> *"German society has made considerable efforts. The counties and municipalities, unions, churches, environmental and development groups and organisations, producer and consumer groups, the scientific community, the media, each individual citizen have contributed to increased environmental protection, quality of life, economic growth and social fairness"* (RG, male, 50s).

In rhetoric it sounds good; however, the primary form of participation has been through consultations, which means that only a fragment of the population has been aware of the possibility to participate in the dialogue and even less have contributed to the process actively. In rhetoric also the numbers of the Local Agenda (LA) groups in Germany are impressing with more than 2,300 German municipalities and practically all major cities participating. In practice, however, many of those groups have been struggling with finding participants and actual participants are in their "silver years". As several interviews with German civil society activists from Freiburg and Karlsruhe suggest, many people who initially participated in the LA activities became frustrated with the uncooperative manner of the officials and started their own initiatives to be able to make a difference[24]. So the practical criticism is based on the observation that although the German SD strategy process proclaims that public participation as important, it remains limited to the circle of invited stakeholder groups, it is not clear exactly what participation is intended for and how it should be executed during the strategy process. As a result, the implementation process does not demonstrate broad active and responsible social inclusion it strives for. In the same manner Ralf Tils has noted that it is not a priori necessary to choose a participatory approach for the SD strategy, but if such an approach is chosen, the strategy concept has to provide a more effective basis for active participation and be specific in how this can be achieved (Tils 2007: 173). Thus it seems that whereas the rhetoric stresses the relevance of broad societal dialogue, building partnerships and participation culture, in reality, the participation levels still mirror a top-down government-centred approach so much more can be done to practically approach the ideal expressed in rhetoric.

Ensuring equal opportunities means the attempt to "take everyone along". The challenge has been in finding good solutions for coping with the changing situations and retaining access to jobs, medical care, education and social security. This is strived for by trying to prevent the division of society into winners and losers, integrating foreign citizens and involve all societal groups in the economic development, social and political life. For example, the German SDS has focused on dealing with the ageing population by creating possibilities for older people to participate in the economy and society. Equity as a goal is a big part of taking responsibility. Finding a balance between the needs of the present generations and the future generations is considered a matter of responsibility between the generations – however, it remains unclear which basis this contract between the generations should build upon and as such, it remains too vague and aloof for the broader population, undermining the attempts of "taking everyone along".

Climate protection and energy transition have been priority areas in the German SD approach since the first NSDS in 2002. Acting to develop new energy sources, increase energy efficiency to adapt to climate change and protect the climate are regarded as actions with urgent global

[24] As AF from the Freiburg Transition initiative commented based on his experience with a local LA21 group in the 1990s: *"Basically, it was too close to administration, it was suffocated by administrative issues. I mean there were lots of people with good ideas who wanted to do things, but in the end the administration did not allow them to do it. So the initiative died down"* (male, 50s).

responsibility. In a way, the goal of climate protection resembles the traditional goal of nature conservation, i.e. taking responsibility for the effects of human actions on the environmental processes and minimising negative effects. To foster climate protection, consumers are seen as the driving force for structural change. It is suggested that achieving inter- and intragenerational equity is possible through conserving the natural foundations of life and fostering biodiversity, radically increasing efficiency, and maintaining sustainable economies. This also involves transitioning to environmentally just mobility and finding healthier ways for production and eating. In the sphere of clean, efficient and renewable energy, Germany has achieved considerable success and has expressed the willingness to share its experiences to foster an international energy transition.

Green economy and sustainable economy are concepts explicitly expressed as keys to SD since the 2012 progress report. The concepts of sustainable economy and green economy seem to be used as synonyms. Under green economy an economy that follows the principles of sparing and efficient use of resources, climate protection, minimising pollution and waste was undersood. The line of reasoning behind promoting sustainable and green economy is that it is useful for Germany as German companies have a strong starting position which gives them a significant competitive advantage in the market: *"Properly understood, sustainability is a significant competitive advantage. German companies have a strong starting position in the competition arena of sustainable economic activity. Many companies are pioneers in the integration of sustainability into their business policies."* (The Federal Government of Germany 2007). The success of green economy depends on the decisions made by consumers on what to purchase and on entrepreneurial activities taking place in a legal framework set by the government(s). The state can create supportive conditions to encourage green innovations in technology transfer, production, service industry and consumption to support the transition to green economy. However, all the actors need to consider the opportunities and risks that globalisation, opening of markets and the true costs of products and services have on increasing inter- and intragenerational equity. The shift of value creation and employment from production to service provision is deemed to continue to accelerate as increases in efficiency are considered the key to economic competitiveness and lower use of energy and resources in the interests of climate protection. Sustainability is seen as the driving force of innovation leading to successful economy and innovative enterprises and vice versa. Table 28 provides an overview of the core theme, categories and their key properties.

**Table 28. Core theme and categories of the German case.**

| **Committed co-creation of good life** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Continuing commitment** | **Creative vision** | **Social cohesion** | **Climate protection** |
| Taking responsibility | Good quality of life | Participation culture | Energy efficiency |
| On-going process | Innovation | Fostering societal dialogue | Ecologically just mobility |
| Integrated SD approach | Culture of sustainability | Inter- and intragenerational equity | Producing and eating healthy |
| Long-term planning | Education reform | Demographic change | Green economy |

To sum up, the German case tells a story of committed co-creation of good life by continuing commitment, developing an innovative creative vision, increasing social cohesion and ensuring changes in production and consumption for climate protection. In the German context culture was considered as culture of sustainability needed for developing a creative vision and as participation culture needed to ensure social cohesion.

In the case of Germany a significant change of narrative or disintegration of the SD-agenda could not be observed, rather adjustments in priorities. The new strategic focus on green growth, and

the UN-initiated 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were integrated into the agenda and a new NSDS was being developed at the time of research. The continuing commitment to the more integrative SD agenda justifies the reputation of Germany as one of the sustainable development pioneers.

## 4.2.3. Portuguese case study

**Main challenges.** According to the Portuguese NSDS "Estratégia Nacional de Desenvolvimento Sustentavel" the central problem and cause for unsustainable development of Portugal was the lacking economic growth. This had been a problem in Portugal already since the dictatorship in the 1970s. The main obstacles to achieving growth were considered to be low economic competitiveness and low levels of skills of the active population. These issues in turn created difficulties in sustaining jobs.

Aside from these difficulties mentioned in the NSDS, a number of further challenges surfaced in the expert interviews. The overarching problem was that the strategy running from 2007 to 2015 was never really implemented, or only in a very limited capacity. It was believed that implementation suffered because of limited administrative capacity, scarce financial and human resources, and change of focus to green economy. Lacking financial and human resources were considered the result of long-term lack of economic growth and were also the main reason why the Portuguese NSDS was never translated into English[25]. The local expert summed these aspects up by arguing that the strategy was not implemented because of bad timing: "*It is about timing. There was a new government and we were under a new financial program, and we have different priorities now so it makes it a bit difficult. And right now, human resources in public administration are really short"* (SP, female, 40s). What was described as different priorities was the focus shift to green economy. Once the EU stopped renewing the EU SDS, so did Portugal, and although the Portuguese NSDS was running until 2015, the actual emphasis and implementation attempts ended over five years earlier when the focus shifted to creating and implementing the Portugal 2020 strategy.

**Solutions for achieving sustainable development: core theme and concepts**

The analysis of the rhetoric and practices of the Portuguese case showed that the core theme of the Portuguese SD-approach is building capacity for green growth. Due to decades of lacking economic growth, sustainable and green economic growth was considered the key to solving a number of pressing issues including lacking human and financial resources and weak state capacity. The central aim of the NSDS was to resume a path of sustained growth that would make Portugal one of the most competitive and attractive EU countries by 2015 with a high level of economic, social and environmental development (ENDS 2007: 12).

The economic focus was further strengthened by the economic crisis facilitating the shift towards growth oriented Lisbon strategy and later the Portugal 2020 strategy that gradually substituted the SD agenda. This led to a situation where SD became reduced to a tool for arguing for resource efficiency and job creation. Whereas the focus shift from the more integrated SD approach to green economy was critically observed by all other governance level interview partners, in Portugal there was no perception of SD having lost its importance or competing with green growth rhetoric. Sustainable growth and sustainable development were considered close concepts, and the expert did not see the change in focus as neglecting the SD-agenda (SP, female, 40s). Instead, the Ministry of Environment was hopeful that the focus on green economic growth could be an opportunity to pick up the SD efforts:

[25] Also other countries, e.g. Denmark and Italy that had their NSDS-s available only in their native languages.

*"We don't think that the concept of SD is being replaced. We are just focusing on having more efficient economy, energy and resources. But it's not competing; it's contributing to SD. Maybe it is trendier to say green growth or green economy, but it is still going towards the main objective of SD – at least in our understanding. … Even if we are focussing on green economy to help boost our economic growth, that could be an opportunity. Let's see"* (SP, female, 40s).

So at the time of research, the experts in Portugal were continuously trying to develop policies to boost economic growth.

Although achieving growth has been the main development aim for Portugal for decades, now the aim was achieving green growth. Greening growth was seen as the key towards more balanced development. It was believed that raising economic competitiveness would help to create new green jobs and raise levels of skilfulness, while ensuring ecological balance by reduced energy intensity and sparing resource use. Ensuring ecological balance, in turn, was seen as the basis for sustained growth.

Increasing social cohesion has been a long-term challenge in Portugal. It has been considered important, but not as important as achieving economic growth. Transition to knowledge society, facilitating access to education in order to support reskilling and participation were seen as keys to counteracting disintegrating social cohesion. As preconditions for knowledge society improving and creating new skills, including cultural and artistic development to cope with changes, and accelerating scientific and technological development as a basis for innovation and new qualifications were deemed necessary. Achieving positive change involved increasing investments in education, research and development and ensuring equal opportunities for accessing education.

Similarly to the Estonian SD-model in Portuguese perception knowledge society is understood as a model for developing qualified human resources from pre-school education to lifelong learning. It was hoped that turning towards knowledge society would help to increase the innovation potential of enterprises and society overall and help to raise the quality of life. Reskilling either in the context of formal or informal education was seen as the key to achieving knowledge society in Portugal. Reskilling was considered so relevant because qualified human resources were seen as the source of scientific and technological innovations crucial for achieving economic growth and social cohesion:

*"Preparing Portugal for the knowledge society is very strongly related to reskilling people. It includes everything related to having more knowledge, having more people with PhDs and actually with high school degree, ready to be part of a society where information and knowledge is much more important than industry or agriculture"* (SP, female, 40s).

When asked about public support to SD agenda in the Portuguese societal context, the expert commented that its meaning is not very clear, probably due to lack of education. However, she added that this is not necessarily an obstacle as: "*..some of the less educated people who work on the farms have a very good natural understanding that they need to respect nature. This sort of respect is more common in the inland or by people who fish – less skilled, or actually highly skilled, less educated people"* (SP, female, 40s). The expert mentioned also the trend of educated people returning to agriculture, approaching it in a new way, as an interesting development intimately related to reskilling. This echoes the sentiment and reasoning of many civil society actors in the sample, where many well educated people who lacked meaning and sense in their daily lives decided to turn towards a simpler way of life, bringing along a new approach as this way of life was intentionally chosen.

Stakeholder participation and participatory processes did not belonged to the strengths of the Portuguese SD-process**.** The participative and strategic goals of the Portuguese NSDS, such as mobilising citizens' initiatives and economic, social and cultural actors were not reached. However, the expert was more optimistic about public participation on the local level, also in the local Agenda 21 groups. She commented that local cooperation was overall livelier and significantly stronger than

cooperation and communication between civil society and governance levels, which is a weak link. Thus the overall Portuguese NSDS process was more expert and official-centred than broadly participatory. Also, international participation and cooperation in SD-matters remained rather weak, which could be explained by the lack of human and financial resources.

Building state capacity. Despite having received a lot of moral and financial support from the EU for tackling environmental and developmental issues in the last decades (Bromley 1997, EEA 1999, Soromenho-Marques 2002), it was clear that the SD-related progress was much slower in Portugal than in the other governance cases in the sample. An efficient and modernised public administration was considered necessary to facilitate reskilling and transition to the knowledge society, which in turn would support economic growth. So an urgent need for public administration reform was felt to provide better regulations, simplify administrative procedures and raise the proportion of information technology to increase efficiency and facilitate communication when providing state services. The limited capacity of the public administration was perceived as one central problem hindering positive developments in Portugal. Related problems included lacking qualified human and financial resources as well as structural reorganisations that were carried out because of the financial austerity measures.
It was hoped that building state capacity would help to strengthen international cooperation and focus on balancing regional developments. The aim of strengthening international cooperation was to reactivate Portuguese efforts for participating in building Europe and taking responsibility for the global processes for consolidation and deepening of peace, democracy, human rights, rule of law, and the fight against poverty. Furthermore, achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which later transformed to the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as ensuring a better and safer environment, and the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem sustainability were mentioned as goals that livelier international cooperation could help to achieve. The lacking state capacity had been hindering the development of these activities. The goal of achieving a balanced regional development was to reduce the negative impact of the peripheral position of Portugal in the EU context by improving and creating infrastructures that would ensure efficient access to international transport and communication networks, improve digital connectivity and enhance the conditions that could support competitiveness. At the time of research, there was no information about if and in which capacity the intended impacts were reached.

As the implementation of the NSDS never really took off and was gradually neglected, it was really difficult to get opinions on this subject from governance representatives[26]. The discomfort in talking about these shortcomings was evident and differed clearly from the open, confident and spontaneous approach used by respondents of other government cases. As the EU expert commented the Portuguese situation:

> *"Yeah, it is difficult. And it is definitely a question of culture and governance culture and a culture of openness and transparency, of citizen participation. And typically, it is very often also a question that if they are not fully doing.. I mean you'd rather try to oppress or hide a bit your shortcomings and weaknesses in these things"* (CE, female, 40s).

However, considering the stress that the limited staff was on, their willingness to share information and give quite an open interview about their difficulties shows that the structural reorganisations seem to have been successful in supporting the development towards a more open, transparent and participative governance culture. However, the research phase coincided with reorganising of the

[26] The negotiations for finding an expert willing and authorised to give an interview in English about the Portuguese SD situation lasted for 6 months. Only 1/3 of the questions were approved and the interview partner had to coordinate the answers with her superiors (exception in the sample), reflecting the sensitivity of the topic.

Portuguese governance structures so it was too early to estimate the impact of the reforms. Table 29 provides an overview of the core theme along with its core concepts and their main properties.

**Table 29. Core theme and categories of the Portuguese case.**

| Building capacity for green growth | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Greening economic growth** | **Social cohesion** | **Building state capacity** |
| Raising competitiveness | Knowledge society | Public administration reform |
| Creating green jobs | Reskilling | Culture of openness and participation |
| Resource and energy efficiency | Education | Strengthening international cooperation |
| Ensuring ecological balance | Participation | Balancing regional development |

So it can be summed up that the Portuguese SD approach is essentially about building different types of capacity for achieving green growth by greening economy, supporting the raise of social cohesion and building state capacity.

### 4.2.4. EU case study

**Main challenges.** Sustainable development has been described as the fundamental objective of the EU since 1997 when it was enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty to underpin all EU policies and actions as an over-arching principle (Euractiv 2006). Translating this decision into practice saw the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) adopted in 2001 and renewed in 2006. The progress towards achieving SD goals set in the strategies was partial at best. During the stock taking in February 2005, the European Commission (EC) confirmed that a number of unsustainable trends have continued to worsen, and in 2006 it was conceded that although the SD is enshrined in the EU Treaty, its implementation has remained a problem (Euractiv 2014). The 2007 progress report estimated similarly that the progress achieved on the ground was modest, and specified that advances of the EU and some member states' policy development were great in several fields like climate change, clean energy and health, but this progress had not yet translated into substantial concrete action (European Commission 2007). In other words, some success had been achieved, especially on the rhetorical and abstract levels, but only modest results were seen on the practical level. The EC concluded: *"The Commission is invited to present a roadmap together with its next Progress Report in June 2009 on the SDS, setting out the remaining actions to be implemented with the highest priority,"* (Council of the European Union 2008). The last review of the EU SDS "Mainstreaming sustainable development into EU policies: 2009 Review of the European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development" (European Commission 2009) from July 2009 emphasised that unsustainable trends persist in many areas and concluded that the efforts need to be intensified and the implementation of the strategy streamlined to bring actual results (EUR-Lex 2013, European Commission 2009). However, instead of providing a roadmap for renewing the strategy or setting out next high-priority actions, it was claimed that in recent years the EU had mainstreamed SD into a broad range of its policies. So despite the above mentioned arguments the EU SDS was not renewed and no planned bi-annual reviews of the EU SDS have been undertaken since 2009[27]. Instead, although the aims of the SDS-s from 2001 and 2006 were not met, the SD agenda was claimed to have been integrated into the EU 2020 strategy for growth and jobs. Interviews with the EU and member state experts indicated that since 2009 the EU SDS has been internally referred to as redundant, with instructions to say: *"and now, whenever we speak about sustainable development, the line is to say that it has been mainstreamed into the Europe 2020 strategy"* (CE, female, 40s).

[27] Despite the bi-annual obligations taken, the last EU SDS review was issued on 24 July 2009.

However, analysing how the development priorities have evolved from the first EU SDS in 2001 to EU 2020, it can be observed that the EU SDS aims were only taken over in a limited capacity. Challenges that remained the same in the two EU SDS strategies include concern for global warming and climate change, public health, transport, poverty and social exclusion, and demographic issues. However, whereas the original strategy explicitly included concern for dealing with implications of an ageing population, loss of biodiversity, increasing waste volumes and regional imbalances, these issues were not included as priority areas in the renewed strategy, although the aims were not reached. Instead, the new strategy added emphasis on clean energy, migration, sustainable consumption and production, and preservation and sustainable management of natural resources. Because the first strategy was considered too regional, the renewed strategy focused more on the international level. As areas needing improvement, developing responses based on cooperation and solidarity, on research and innovation and on education were considered relevant. When looking at how the priority issues have changed in the transition from the EU SDS to the EU 2020 strategy, it becomes clear that what has remained are the aims that support the overall economic competitiveness and green growth goal. Issues such as public health, biodiversity or sustainable transport were not included. The challenges that remained the same across all three strategies included the concern for global warming and climate change, decreasing poverty and social exclusion, and dealing with demographic issues. The comparison of the themes shows that the strategy reduces SD to developing a greener, more efficient and more competitive economy (EU2020 2010: 10-19). Perhaps the most telling fact is that the EU2020 strategy does not contain the concept of "sustainable development" at all. This indicates a clear disconnection from the current course, which can be described as a paradigm change from the integrated SD approach to dominant economic focus. It can thus be argued that, even though the EU2020 also includes ecological and social considerations, it reduces the former three-dimensional SD-approach to an economy-dominated SD-perception. So it can be concluded that the decision not to prolong EU SDS, but to integrate or mainstream the SD agenda into the EU 2020 strategy has meant simplifying and limiting SD-agenda to aspects serving the strategy of growth and jobs. So after almost a decade of SD-efforts, the integrated SD-agenda was dropped and a significant shift in focus took place.

Moreover, analysing the SD processes in the EU from 2000 to 2015 makes evident that next to the economising shift also a shift towards externalising SD concern took place. Whereas the first SD-strategy was considered too regional, the renewed strategy was designed to consider more the impact of the EU policies on SD at the global level, strengthening the external dimension of the strategy (Bernheim 2006: 49). Explaining why the integrative SD-approach has been dropped in the EU itself in favour of the economised approach and the integrated approach has been used only in relation to international issues, the EU expert explained that the *"line is to say"* that the big SD-problems have been solved in the EU (CE, female, 40s). The claim is problematic in its abstract and generalising nature, disregarding the significant differences across member states, as the three country case studies exemplify, and the fact that the aims that the EU SDS-s set were not met once the strategy was discontinued. It is true that the EU has enjoyed the status of a SD-pioneer and sponsor, but as the SD reviews and reports clearly showed, much remains to be done in the EU before it can be said that the problems are solved or that SD has been mainstreamed. Commenting this situation, the EU expert said that one reason for the lack of international success on SD front has to do with the EU expecting from others what has not been fully done at home, which does not seem legitimate for the international partners. So the conclusion of this discussion of the main challenges is that the claim that SD has been mainstreamed is premature and the EU still has enough to do internally to find ways for sustainable development.

**Solutions for achieving sustainable development: core theme and concepts**

It has been argued (e.g. Markham 2011, Roose 2002) that the EU has more influence on its member states than any other international governmental organization, which makes studying its rhetoric and actions in planning sustainable future especially interesting and relevant.

The analysis shows that the core theme of the EU SD-approach is change of narrative: externalising and economising SD. This change was accompanied by the steady increase of emphasis on the economic growth at the expense of other pillars. In the original EU SDS, sustainable development was understood as a development model that provides a positive vision for the future: *"Sustainable development offers the EU a positive long-term vision of a society that is more prosperous and more just, and which promises a cleaner, safer, healthier environment – a society which delivers a better quality of life for us, for our children, and for our grandchildren"* (EU SDS 2001: 2). Here the relation to growth was not prominent; the SD model relied on the classical triple-bottom line SD-model with three pillars: economic, ecological and social development (WCED 1987). Its relevance started to grow around the renewed SDS in 2006.

The SD perception of the Union has changed over the years, especially in terms of increasingly moving from the initial integrative SD-approach towards a less integrated SD-approach internally, and developing a more external focus. Since then the relevance of "green" growth as a precondition for SD has been growing. Thus SD is understood as a development based on "green" consumption and production patterns that do not degrade natural resources and promotes the equitable sharing of well-being to all and help to alleviate poverty on the global scale, both intra- and inergenerationally.

Figure 11 summarises the processes in regards to SD on the EU level from the beginning of the 2000nds to 2020 on the EU internal level and until 2030 on the international level.

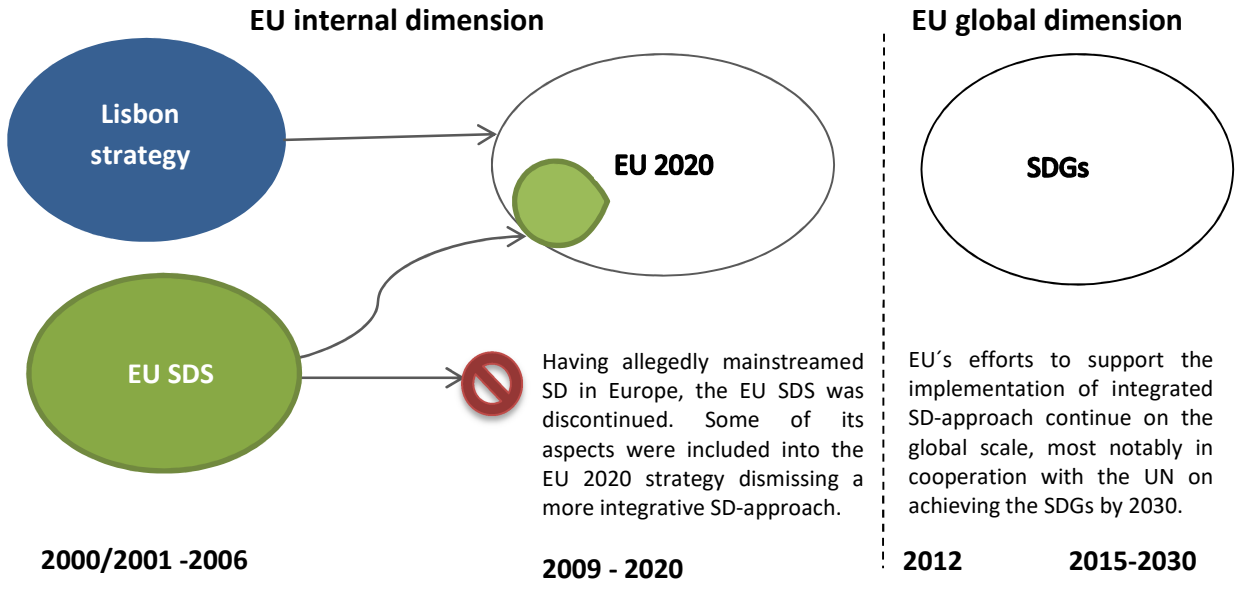



**Figure 11. Development of EU´s internal and external SD-approach 2000 - 2030.**

This process can be described as the disintegration of the integrative SD-approach internally and a renewed commitment to SD externally on the global level.

The change of narrative was a result of having two parallel development strategies for the EU in the first decade of 2000nds: the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs in 2000 and the EU SDS in 2001. Their different orientations influenced the unfolding of sustainable development processes throughout the 2000nds, causing some confusion. The European Commission sustainability expert interviewed for this study opened the reasons not written down in any documents, saying that many EU officials found having two overarching strategies confusing and wanted to have just one (CE, female, 40s). The expert added that the economising turn was the result of pressure from businesses that had the impression that the European SD-debate was focussing too heavily on the social and environmental aspects at the expense of the economic dimension and were hoping that the renewed Lisbon strategy in the form of EU 2020 would change that. The strategy for growth and jobs was devised by the European Council to refocus the EU and its member states on economic growth and job creation with the aim of making the EU *"the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion"* by 2010 (Lisbon European Council Presidency Conclusion 2000). As these goals were not reached by 2010, the "Europe 2020" (EU2020) became the follow-up strategy, adopted in June 2010. Although the aims of the EU SDS were also not met, the strategy was not renewed, but integrated into the EU 2020. The EU2020 managed to create the desired paradigm change from an integrated development approach to an economised approach.

The change of narrative and development focus has different reasons. The first reason is reacting to the internal resistance of the officials to having two overarching EU strategies. The second reason are the failed attempts to reconcile disparities between the EU SDS and the Lisbon strategy. Thirdly, strong lobbying towards shifting the focus to growth and competitiveness by the economic actors and fourth, the economic crisis made the economic growth-arguments more relevant, playing a significant part in this shift. A further reason could be the shift from internal to external focus. It has been justified by stating that big and serious SD problems, like air pollution, had been solved in the EU, "*so the integrative approach was no longer seen as necessary*" (CE, female, 40s), whereas internationally they remained problematic. This justification is surprisingly crude, along the lines of: if the pollution no longer causes immediate illnesses in the EU, the fragmented business-as-usual approach can be resumed. However, pollution knows no national boundaries, making this reasoning immature.

In the light of the fact that most of the aims of EU SDS were not reached, it seems understandable that it was never officially stated that the SD-strategy has been discontinued, or explained why the EC has stopped issuing progress reports as intended. As discussed under country cases, the way the EU SDS was silently dropped also caused problems for several member states that had used it as a stable basis for developing their own legislation and planning, such as Germany (CE, female, 40s).

Looking back, it becomes evident that the change began already back in 2006, when the preparations for the first EU SDS renewal prompted questions on whether the integrative SD approach had been dropped in reality (Tanasescu 2009: 189), and gave ground for the suggestion that the current SD approach is failing to secure SD for the present and future generations (Bernheim 2006: 79). In 2006 the Barroso Commission set the course on prolonging the Lisbon strategy, comparing the three pillars of the Lisbon strategy (economic competitiveness, social inclusion and environmental protection) to "three children", one of which – competitiveness – needs more attention than the others (Euractiv 2014). This gave ground for arguments that although the EU claims that SD is an overarching principle, the issue of EUs economic competitiveness has come to dominate the political

agenda in the face of globalisation (Connelly 2012: 206). What makes this shift problematic is the danger of undermining environmental and social aspects in favour of economic interests.

Having adopted a more business-affine approach brought criticism for being in the pocket of businesses to the Directorate-General for the Environment at European Commission, the leading structure pushing SD-issues. However, according to the expert CE, starting to use the *"language of business"* has brought significant benefits. The most relevant point is perhaps that doing economic and cost-benefit analysis of their issues has made it possible to communicate the relevant issues in a way that other policy-making structures listen and consider their inputs more readily, whereas earlier their inputs were often just sidelined as incompatible with the mainstream rhetoric and interests. Adopting new ways of bringing out the win-wins of the SD-agenda their approach is understood much better, which has helped to exit the situation where SD-agenda was still considered an environmental issue. The expert estimated that the change of narrative towards economising SD was an intentional step that took place in the EU structures between 2010 and 2014 under the head of Director General of Environment Janez Potočnik to generate broader support for the SD-agenda:

> *"I think that our narrative has changed, I have seen this. This has been very much the agenda of our Commissioner that since the beginning of his mandate he has said: we need to speak the language of business. We cannot go on just all the time talking about the preservation of the environment, and speaking from our corner"* (CE, female, 40s).

Having experienced the situation before and after the shift, the expert was satisfied with the results. So despite the risks of this turn including simplifying the SD approach, it was considered ultimately useful for raising the profile of SD concerns (even if under a different concept) and resulting in dialogues instead of being brushed off.

Achieving **economic growth** along with its main properties of resource efficiency, sustainable production and consumption, raising global competitiveness and innovation capacity has become the dominant development goals of the EU for the period of 2010-2020. In fact, the EU2020 strategy differentiates between different types of growth, listing smart growth, sustainable growth, inclusive growth and economic governance as its priorities (European Commission 2014b). Put simply, the economy is considered green when the resource use is decoupled from economic growth; or in other words, while the economic growth continues, the resource use does not grow along with it. Reorientation to green growth and a low-carbon economy is regarded a way to protect the environment: *"Decoupling environmental degradation and resource consumption from economic and social development requires a major reorientation of public and private investment towards new, environmentally-friendly technologies"* (EU SDS 2001: 2). This can be achieved by increasing resource efficiency through improving management as well as technological innovation, and makes it possible to strive towards the conservation of natural resources.

As mentioned earlier, the SD concept was not included in the EU2020 and the concept of sustainability features in the EU 2020 in a fairly limited capacity in one of the three mutually reinforcing priorities smart growth, sustainable growth, and inclusive growth. Thus, from the classical SD-perspective sustainability is included the EU2020 strategy as a condition for ensuring viable economic growth. Without mentioning the concept, increasing growth is seen as a necessity for achieving sustainable development. The EU2020 seems to neglect the controversy of the concept of sustainable growth, discussed in Chapter three under the limits to growth line of reasoning. Instead it seems, that the EU structures consider achieving sustainable economic growth a straightforward necessity for a better life, although *"the notion of sustainable growth is, to say the least, a tricky*

*concept which upon analysis might be rather more fragile than they assume"* (Connelly 2012: 206). These considerations lead to the conclusion that although the EU 2020 strategy has much more concrete and measurable goals than the EU SDS-s had, it rests on a relatively abstract vision of development which seems disconnected from the physical reality setting limits to growth. The compatibility of the aim of achieving sustainable growth with the more integrated sustainable development approach remains questionable.

For supporting sustainable production and consumption creating legislative incentives for changing consumer and producer behaviour was considered relevant. Interestingly, it was changing the behavioural aspects that the expert CE brought up when asked if culture is in any way included in SD considerations. Whereas cultural issues in general were considered too controversial and problematic due to vast differences across the Union, behavioural economics was considered as a possible future solution for improving the predictability of behavioural change across different cultures in the EU and make the legislation smarter. The aim was to find a formula that would be acceptable across the whole EU and could anticipate societal and cultural reactions to new incentives such as making the prices right.

For raising global competitiveness also increasing innovation by investing more in research and development is seen as the engine running the transition from energy and resource intensive growth to green growth. The EU has been successful in making the transition acceptable for the companies, although there were worries among the experts that once the green solutions are not profitable anymore, the companies would return to their cheaper business-as-usual approach (SP, female, 40s).

The currently dominating EU development approach reduces SD to a means for developing a greener, more efficient and more competitive economy based on knowledge and innovation, achieving high-employment economy, which is seen to deliver social and territorial cohesion (EU2020 2010: 10-19). Consequently, the EU2020 can be described as uncritical towards the growth paradigm, and in contradiction with the prior SD-model, which aimed at the integrated and equal development of ecological, economic and social dimensions in the spirit of WCED. Although the EU continuously states that SD is the over-arching principle of all EU policies, in reality, the issue of EU's economic competitiveness has come to dominate the development agenda.

Dealing with **climate change** as the second core concept of this case was seen relevant as a precondition for strengthening economic competitiveness. Boosting sustainable growth was considered possible through two flagship initiatives: resource efficient Europe with a low-carbon economy, where economic growth would be decoupled from resource and energy use; and an industrial policy fit to respond to globalisation, the economic crisis and the shift to a low-carbon economy by supporting entrepreneurship (EU2020 2010: 14-17). Tools for achieving this included reducing greenhouse gas emissions, using resources sparingly, achieving an increase in energy efficiency and increasing the share of renewable energy in the final energy consumption. As an urgent threat, the concern for the effects of global warming was considered a weighty reason for making decisive steps towards less polluting and wasteful ways of producing and using energy, and developing smarter and more sustainable mobility solutions.

**Social inclusion** is the third core concept of the EU case. Its main properties are decreasing poverty by increasing employment, fostering participative approach by supporting sustainable communities, ensuring equal opportunities and access to social services. In the current context, social inclusion was considered relevant as a means for ensuring sustainable economic growth. According to EU 2020, the

keys to ensuring economic growth included making sure that the population is competitive on the job market and has innovation capacity by increasing investments in research and development, reducing the share of early school leavers and fostering further education after high school, and reducing the number of Europeans living below national poverty lines.

SD is seen as a development that is concerned with taking responsibility and ensuring inter- and intragenerational equity. As the then EC president José Manuel Barroso said in 2013: "*Ultimately, sustainability is about responsibility, about intergenerational solidarity. It is about changing the way we act today to allow future generations to meet their needs tomorrow"* (Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations 2013). Increasing employment to eradicate poverty has been one of the main aims of the EU that has continued to EU 2020. Green growth is a way to ensure that while creating new jobs, they are also environmentally sound or at least less damaging than in the case of aiming for regular growth. One of the central aims of the Lisbon strategy was to ensure the continuation of the European Social Model. In this vein, the Lisbon Agenda included the objective to make a decisive impact on *"the eradication of poverty"* by 2010. Now that the EU2020 has taken over this target, it remains to be seen which progress will result from it.

Ensuring equal opportunities is a goal that includes equal access to public services, such as health care. Also accessibility to education plays a relevant role here as it is considered one of the keys to raising the innovation potential and competitiveness of the EU citizens. The EU has invested in education and training; however, investments in long-term SD-education are limited and short-term projects cannot offer the continuity needed for impactful long-term developments.

It was suggested that achieving the overall aim of the EU SDS to identify and develop actions that help the EU in achieving a continuous long-term improvement of the quality of life could be done through the creation of sustainable communities. Here the concept of sustainable communities differs from the civil society cases. Sustainable communities according to the EU are communities which are able to manage and use resources efficiently, able to tap the ecological and social innovation potential of the economy and able to ensure prosperity, environmental protection and social cohesion. These communities are much larger in nature than the small-scale communities where people actually know each other which the civil society initiatives consider relevant for SD-transition. The development of the Aalborg process and the different awards to sustainable cities are related to these efforts towards establishing more sustainable communities (see 3.4.2.1. for more details).

A socially inclusive society characterised by the broad involvement of citizens on all levels, businesses and social partners, and solidarity within and between the generations was seen as a precondition for achieving SD already in the first EU SDS: *"..while public authorities have a key role in providing a clear long-term framework, it is ultimately individual citizens and businesses who will deliver the changes in consumption and investment patterns needed to achieve sustainable development"* (EU SDS 2001: 5). The EU SD-agenda maintained that the efforts to achieve SD ultimately depend on a widespread ownership of the strategy by individuals and businesses, as well as civil society and local and regional authorities which can be fostered by engaging in comprehensive dialogue. The EU planned to intensify dialogue with relevant organisations and platforms that can offer valuable advice by drawing attention to the likely impact of current policies on future generations (EU SDS 2001: 15). In rhetoric broad ownership and active participation of different societal actors has been called for, but in practice there were several practical unsolved issues related to participation and feedback mechanisms with the governance. In this respect, a remark of the expert CE about the ability to make changes across different societal sectors deserves mention, namely the estimation that the civil society level is better in change-making as it is more flexible and able to decide and act faster. This was also pointed out by numerous civil society actors who had had more contact with governance

led outreach initiatives as Agenda 21 groups. Also the EU expert commented that due to the Internet-era there was currently too much pressure to respond to every opinion coming from the individual citizens, making the workload of the administrative staff greater and rendering little content-relevant inputs as a result (CE, female, 40s). The individual initiatives tended to approach the governance level in such a small-scale manner. In fact, joining forces with other likeminded movements would be the preferred way as this would deliver input that could be used and would reduce the amount of individual inquiries. So it seems that the ways of participating in an effective manner are needed. In Chapter 5 suggestions for improving mutual understanding, communication and cooperation of the governance and civil society actors are provided.

**Vague responsibility** is the fourth core concept of the EU case study. The EU SDS suggested that in order to realise SD a new way of policymaking would be necessary. The interviews with the governance representatives brought out that one of the main reasons for the change of narrative and the economising turn was the vagueness the SD-agenda – its lack of focus (on reversely, too broad spectrum of issues) and effective monitoring indicators and future targets eventually leading to a lack of interest. From the onset, regular monitoring and reviewing of the SD-process were considered necessary for ensuring its success; however, this along with many other good SD-related ideas was not followed through. Also, the planned SD committee was never established, which means that the agreements and obligations agreed upon were not binding, which eventually led to limited results. When countries created their SD-councils, their relation to the EU was not unified. Also in the EU structures, the SD coordination and planning were somewhat vague. Attempts to resume the taken commitments have been made over the years. For example, the EU Environment Council laid down in its Conclusions on Rio+20 of October 2012 that the EU SDS should be reviewed as soon as possible, in 2014 at the latest, but no actions resulted. The way the EU SDS was discontinued was also vague, as was the claimed mainstreaming of SD-agenda to the EU 2020 strategy. It could be argued that such vagueness led to a lack of responsibility for the integrative SD-approach in the EU. The member states looked towards the EU for guidance and orientation, whereas the EU has depended on the inputs of the stakeholders including the member states and expected that they are more active in their own right. As the business lobby was much more professional and effective, their positions became central for the current decade and although the aims set by the EU SDS-s were not met, the integrated SD-agenda faded to the background. Considering this vagueness surrounding the SD-agenda, this development is not surprising. The narrative turn towards economising and externalising has increased the attention to taking international responsibility.

Indeed, on the international level the situation has been much better, partly due to the initiatives of the UN to keep the international SD-agenda alive and reinvigorate it periodically. The EU carries the stance that the developed countries have the responsibility to take the lead. However, also here the situation has been somewhat vague. The EU SD-expert commented that people have lost faith in international negotiations as they often result in nothing beyond nice rhetoric. Especially when the EU demands something which they themselves have not implemented fully, it does not convince the partners in other countries to join in: *"The Commission believes that the EU should start by putting its own house in order, to provide international leadership as a first step towards achieving global sustainability"* (CE, female, 40s). Although much has been achieved, also in the EU the solutions so far can be described as partial – for instance, whereas the Eurostat has measured the progress and published the results in its reports, the SD priorities have not been regularly reviewed or renewed, and planned permanent dialogues with citizens have not been established.

Despite moderate success in achieving SD goals, the EU has considered itself a global leader in shaping SD policies since early 2000nds (Barry 2004: 165). However, throughout the research

process, it was possible to observe the dependence of the EU on the UN in terms of SD issues. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, this dynamic has remained the same since 1970s and 1980s. Especially the UN international conferences have helped to raise the profile and revive interest in SD issues. The most recent example is the development of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the framework of the Agenda 2030 process together with 195 countries. While it is also true that the Europeans often push for the SD issues in the UN, structurally the innovation and resurgence impulses come from the UN, who multiplies them to its member states.

**Table 30. The core theme and categories of the EU case.**

| Change of narrative: externalising and economising SD | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Economic growth** | **Climate change** | **Social inclusion** | **Vague responsibility** |
| Resource efficiency | Global warming | Increasing employment | New way of policymaking |
| Sustainable consumption and production | Clean energy | Sustainable communities | Ownership issues |
| Global competitiveness and innovation capacity | Sustainable transport | Equal opportunities | Dependency on UN |

So essentially, the EU narrative tells about changing priorities and moving towards externalising and economising SD by focusing on fostering sustainable economic growth and social inclusion while dealing with climate change issues and vague responsibility and ownership issues.

# 4.3. Analysis of civil society and governance approaches

Grounded theory seeks to understand what the main problems of participants are and how they try to solve them. This chapter has analysed the ways the research participants from different sectors and corners of Europe have understood and practiced sustainable development. This analysis progressed from individual cases to the network level and finishes here with articulating the core themes and categories representing the SD-approaches of the civil society and governance actors in the sample.

## 4.3.1. Analysis of the governance cases

When looking at the main problems causing unsustainability according to the governance cases, a number of standard issues such as developing more sparing and sustainable energy and transport solutions and counteracting social exclusion emerged. The EU and German strategies were relatively classical in the sense of being in tune with the traditional three-dimensional SD understanding, adding the need to adjust the administrative or political structures to meet the pressing challenges. The Estonian and Portuguese strategies also included these aspects but stood out for other reasons. For example, differently from the EU and German strategies, the Portuguese and Estonian strategies did not address climate change and global warming issues. From one side this was due to a more local focus, but mainly because these strategies had not been updated for a longer period of time although the relevance of these issues has been growing. Another example is that although the EU and German strategies also addressed the need to deal with demographic change, the Estonian NSDS features an unusual focus on ensuring national survival. The small and shrinking population gave ground for an urgent concern for survival, making maintaining cultural and demographic viability aspects with key relevance for SD in Estonia.

It is noteworthy that the results of the case study analysis crystallised in the core themes and categories differed from the sustainable development models expressed in the strategies. For example, considering rhetoric as well as practice, the Estonian SD situation could not be summed up as "paradigm shift to knowledge society" with cultural viability, growth of welfare, social coherence and

ecological balance as core concepts, as suggested in the NSDS. This would have meant oversimplifying the actual situation characterised by the economising turn and being pulled between two development directions. Table 31 below gives an overview of the case study results covering the core themes and categories along with their key properties.

**Table 31. Overview of the core themes and categories of the governance approaches to SD.**

| Governance cases | |
|---|---|
| **Estonia** | **Between business-as-usual and knowledge society**: knowledge society, ensuring survival, economising turn |
| **Germany** | **Committed co-creation of good life**: continuing commitment, creative vision, social cohesion, climate protection |
| **Portugal** | **Building capacity for green growth**: greening economic growth, social cohesion, building state capacity |
| **EU** | **Change of narrative to externalising and economising SD**: economic growth, climate change, social inclusion, vague responsibility |

The difference from the planned SD-model can be explained by the fact that the analysis was based not only on the plans expressed in the SDS-s and other related documents, but also on ways these plans had been understood and put to practice over the years. Next to statistics and reviews the expert interviews were especially helpful by providing information on newer, often unwritten developments helping to fill in gaps in the developments.

What also differed across the cases was the **level of commitment and consistency of SD efforts**. There were big differences in the consistency of efforts invested in maintaining and developing the SD process. The differences included the time horizon for planning, the degree of taking responsibility for the cause and dedication to implementing the SD agenda. A strong tendency for not keeping well-documented SD-related promises and decisions could be observed. For example, despite clear statements that the political mandate for SD is a process that must constantly be adapted to current developments, the obligation of producing regular reviews and updating the SD-agenda was mostly neglected at the end of the first decade of the new century. As an exception, the **German** strategy has been regularly monitored and reviewed. Of the case study countries, Germany exhibited the most consistent efforts and long-term planning; the cooling of the EU's interest impacted the national SD-efforts the least. The compilation of progress reports and renewal of the strategy has continued and the governmental level has been vocal in advocating for the renewal of the EU SDS. The local SD-expert argued that this consistency stems from the historical tradition of nature protection coupled with discipline from the Prussian times. In the case of **Estonia**, the consistency of efforts can be described as moderate, as the processes have been more mixed. Also in this case people have a tradition of fostering a close connection with nature, and nature protection has been one of the main motivations strengthening civil society since the 1980s (see 3.3.2.2. for more details), exemplified by the success of the LDI movement. However, Estonian politics was much more influenced by the focus shift to green growth on the EU level, so despite the strategy officially running until 2030, the integrated SD-approach is not prioritised any more, the concept has lost momentum, having remained too abstract, and no updates to the existing strategy had been made, although the statistical data is still collected and monitored. In **Portugal**'s case, SD-considerations were never really put to practice in the first place. The expert argued that this was due to financial difficulties, lack of human resources, bad timing and change of focus. As economic growth has been a Portuguese development aim for decades, the shift to neglecting the more integrative approach in favour of the more economised perspective came relatively easy.

As discussed in chapter 3, the EU has taken a forerunner role and extensively financed global SD-efforts. However, when looking at the developments from the early 1990s, the strength of the UN's impact in motivating European SD-efforts became evident. After the first UN Rio conference the EU needed almost a decade to gear up its act. The first EU SDS was finished just in time for the next UN SD-conference in Johannesburg. The EU put pressure on member states to create their individual SDS-s. Among the case study countries, Germany was the first in 2002, Estonia followed in 2005 (one year after joining the EU), and Portugal in 2007. However, at about the same time when the Portuguese strategy was adopted, the economic crisis caused SD-issues to lose momentum in the EU, helping to explain why the strategy never really took off in Portugal. After a decline, the topic regained relevance on the eve of the UN Rio+20 conference and after that due to preparing the Agenda 2030 and the SDG-s. Thus it can be argued that the EU interest has been supported by the consistency of the UN, similarly to the national SD efforts having largely relied on the EU's developments.

In terms of **similarities**, all cases tackled issues like growth of welfare, raising competitiveness and social cohesion, ensuring ecological balance and resource efficiency, and the need to reform administrative and policymaking procedures. The main similarities also encompass the change of narrative and the myth of SD being mainstreamed in Europe.

G**rowth of welfare via achieving green growth** was a relevant topic in all cases. Put simply, economy was considered green when resource use is decoupled from economic growth; or in other words, while economic growth continues, resource use does not grow along with it (EU SDS 2001: 2). Raising employment rate, increasing investments in research and development, and contributing to increasing the well-educated population were all means to this end, helping to raise the competitiveness potential. The German and Estonian approaches stood out as they broadened the scope and included also cultural, ethical and creative aspects as criteria for good quality of life.

The efforts to **increase social cohesion** encompassed attempts to ensure equal opportunities, increasing employment to reduce poverty, foster participation and inclusion in its various forms, and education and research to support innovation capacity among the population. The role of education and lifelong learning was tackled in each approach, but it emerged as a key property only in the national cases. What stood out was the way the Portuguese used the concept of "reskilling" as a relevant part of their attempts to raise capacity and competitiveness of Portuguese people. This concept is also used extensively in Transition cases; however, there the main reason people engage in reskilling was the perceived lack of meaningfulness in their current field of activities and the desire to find more fulfilling ways of life. In Portugal, reskilling served the purpose of preparing people for the needs of the existing and developing system to adjust it according to the needs of the time.

All cases tackled ways to maintain **ecological balance**. Lessening pollution and resource depletion by decoupling growth from resource use, reducing the loss of biological diversity, and increasing the use of clean energy and sustainable means of transport were all concurrent factors in this context. Reorientation to green growth and a low-carbon economy was regarded as a way to protect the environment: improving resource management and technological innovation was believed to enable conservation of natural resources. Interestingly, climate change and global warming issues did not belong to the cross-cutting issues, as they were not present in the Portuguese and Estonian strategies. These issues were tackled in separate approaches in these countries. As discussed below under culture, different approaches were used in terms of the human-nature relationship and in some cases this issue was even explicitly addressed. It is rather unexpected that ecological aspects, which are so central to the emergence of the SD-agenda, did not emerge among core concepts. On the other hand, this is in tune with the economising turn which looks at nature as a basis for economic growth.

**Technological development and innovation** was considered relevant in all approaches, but in some, it was argued that technology is not enough to act as the driving force on its own and that a shared vision of the future is needed for that. For example, in the German approach, SD was not considered simply a technocratic route to a better life, but a collaborative, participatory social co-creative process needing a creative vision. It is emphasised that SD has to be connected with the imaginative and creative vision of *"how we want to live in the future"* (DE SDS 2002). In this context SD requires reconsidering the values, social models and cultural tradition – in short, leaving the beaten track and finding new directions. Also the Estonian strategy considered the immaterial aspects influencing achieving SD relevant.

This leads us to the **inclusion of culture** in SD considerations. Cultural considerations were included to some extent in all national SDS-s where it was mostly argued that turning towards sustainable development requires reforms in the culture and practices of state governance. The strongest emphasis on culture was made in the Estonian NSDS, where the viability of the cultural space was seen as a precondition for achieving sustainability of Estonia. Such inclusion of cultural viability among top priorities for ensuring sustainable development was a unique feature of the Estonian approach in terms of the sample and also in the broader European context. In this way the Estonian approach deviates from the traditional triple-bottom-line design. For example in Germany, including "culture of sustainability" as a goal was suggested by people during consultations, but finally it was integrated into the NSDS as a sub-aspect, not a goal.

Interestingly, the borderline between the "pioneers" and "laggards" in implementing the SD agenda by interviewed experts was perceived to run not along the recent political division to Eastern and Western Europe, but rather along the culturally conditioned axis of Northern and Southern Europe. Germany and Estonia were in this regard perceived as belonging to the pioneers and Portugal to the laggards. Accessibility of SD-related info is a good example of why this perception developed. In Germany and Estonia, SD-related information was readily available, also in English. In Germany setting up the interview took more time and effort than in Estonia, but less than in Portugal. In Germany this was more due to formalities of a big country (differently from the small Estonia where two interviews were set up in one week) than for fear of discussing a difficult topic (as was the case in Portugal, causing the process to last several months). In Portugal the accessibility of SD-related info in English was very limited; also the NSDS was only available in Portuguese. So, next to official documents and information from relevant websites, a lengthy search for information via telephone calls and email communication was necessary. In this case the expert interview was not only necessary for getting the newest insights into recent developments, but indispensable to put the pieces together. Explaining the situation the high-ranking EU SD expert commented: *"If you haven´t done it, hide it"* (CE, female, 40s). Factors influencing the situation were also that Estonian and German governmental structures were more open to cross-sectoral communication and dialogue.

The relationship with nature can also be considered a cultural trait. Again, in all country cases this aspect was featured to some extent. For example, the Estonian main goal of achieving knowledge society involved seeing humans as interconnected parts of the ecosystem, implying that in the current business-as-usual approach the humans were seen as somehow separate and external to it. In the case of Portugal the expert pointed out that whereas the population does not know much about the SD-thematic as the level of education is lacking, it is often the simpler and less educated people who naturally have respect for nature that supports achieving SD goals. In this context also the development that educated people were returning to simpler jobs in agriculture, but doing it in a different, intentional manner, was mentioned. This echoes the sentiment and reasoning of many civil society actors in the sample, where many well educated people who lacked meaning and sense in their

daily lives decided intentionally to turn towards a simpler way of life, doing things in a new way. However, in governance cases there were no suggestions for adopting voluntary simplicity to support achieving the joint development goals.

There were also impactful developments that were not written down in SD-strategies, but presented themselves in practice. These were the **vagueness of the SD-process**, **economising turn**, **dwindling of the relevance of the integrative SD-approach**, and **internationalising SD efforts**. These aspects created a shift in focus recognised as a **paradigm change or change of narrative** across all cases. The decision of renewing the Lisbon strategy as the EU 2020 strategy and not renewing the EU SDS strategy represents the formal and external side of this paradigm shift. When analysing the developments, it becomes evident that the rest of the aspects have been subjected to the priority of economic development and growth. Tthe social dimension comes next in line after economy with increasing social cohesion seen as a way to foster innovation, competitiveness and economic growth. The ecological dimension is most of all considered as a source of urgency and concern in terms of climate change and global warming, and in terms of the need to use resources more efficiently to avoid further acceleration of pollution, resource depletion and biodiversity loss. In the post-EU SDS period, the integrative SD view has shifted to developing countries and the international scene. The economising turn is also expressed in the way people, communities and the whole civil society has been summed up as consumers. An example from the German NSDS describes the responsibility of everybody to contribute to SD: all are responsible for setting goals for reducing energy consumption and the emission of greenhouse gases, as without the active engagement of industry, commerce and consumers, these goals cannot be achieved (DE SDS 2002: 162).

The resonance to these developments was different across the cases. The EU representatives were rather satisfied, as starting to use the economised approach to communicate SD-issues had made their positions more understandable and acceptable to partners, although with the cost of limiting their scope. In German and Estonian contexts it caused worry for dropping the integrated SD agenda and reducing it to factors that support clearer and easily measurable short-term goals of economic growth. In the German case, the change of focus was the slightest and the integrative approach was upheld with firm commitment. The Portuguese case was the only one where the shift in focus was not considered very significant and interpreted simply as a way to support achieving the overall SD cause. In Portugal the belief in economic growth as a key to solving development problems was the strongest and their SD-approach was closer to the Lisbon and later 2020 strategies focusing on growth and jobs all along. So they perceived the least contradiction between the integrated SD agenda and the economised development agenda. As the integrated SD approach was never really implemented, the green growth focus was considered supportive for proceeding with SD efforts by creating environmentally friendly jobs, raising resource and energy efficiency and supporting reskilling in education.

A comparison of the themes tackled in the EU SDS and EU 2020 and the respective national versions shows that most aims set in the SDS-s were not met by the time the paradigm shifted. This means that the externalisation (focus on the international dimension) and simplification (taking along only certain aspects that serve the aims of creating jobs and raising competitiveness) of the integrated SD approach can be described as problematic, because these issues were not solved back home before focusing on solving international issues. Of course the shift was not exclusive and many considerations were integrated into policymaking and administrative practices, but the aims of the SDS were not reached by far and the ongoing changes were not integrated any more. Essentially the economising turn in the EU also entailed strengtheining the position of weak sustainability. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5. Thus, it can be said that the development approach driven by

economic considerations has become dominant in Europe in the second decade of the 21st century on the governance level, bringing along a loss of diversity and depth in the rhetoric and practices of SD.

This leads us to the **claim of SD having been mainstreamed in Europe**. Speaking of SD having been mainstreamed in the EU is part of the official line that is held onto by most governance actors. There is no doubt that the EU has invested a lot of effort and finances into dealing with SD-issues in the roughly 25 years since the first Rio conference in 1992 and has been the driver of the SD processes in most member states. Many sustainability considerations have been integrated into legislative systems of the union and its member states and are considered when making decisions. The EU has remained an important player in terms of sustainability innovations and investments on the global scale. However, analysis shows that the mainstreaming took place primarily on paper as many goals were not reached even at the time when the strategies were at the height of their relevance, which in turn led to inconsistent progress. As the case studies show, there are significant gaps in implementation. The differences between the cases were also reflected upon in expert interviews, who used their anonymity to openly express their views. The German SD-expert commented that it was not easy to agree that SD has been mainstreamed in Europe and found the increasing economic focus undermining the integrative SD concept and strategy worrying (RG, male, 50s). Another expert added that reasons for the considerable differences between countries in terms of implementation or availability of information depended on the local culture and strength of the civil society:

> *"I think it is very-very difficult, particulary in the EU, where we have very different cultures. And you know pretty well that in the South things are quite messy, while all the best practices basically come from the North of Europe. So there's no secret to that… We do realise that we have a challenge there"* (CE, female, 40s).

When comparing the level of realising SD aims in Germany that has a relatively open participation culture and Portugal, where openness and participation culture need to be built up, it is hard to say that SD has been mainstreamed in Portugal. So, considering these developments and the different *status quo* across member states, the claim that SD has been mainstreamed in Europe loses its credibility. The myth of SD having been mainstreamed in Europe can be debunked as oversimplifying and strongly exaggerated summary of the situation. It would be more fair to say that many efforts have been made across the EU and that SD has been partly mainstreamed on the level of agreements and legislation, but that it has been put to practice inconsistently and the progress towards SD has been uneven.

When considering the causes for not having mainstreamed SD in Europe, the main ones are probably vagueness and a lack of specific measures and obligations assigned to the cause. Several governance experts reasoned that the EU SDS failed in comparison to the Lisbon and the EU 2020 strategies precisely because related activities were not mandatory, so the responsibility remained too abstract and vague. The EU SD-expert noted that even in the EU structures people were disappointed in strategies and international negotiations which require lots of effort but rarely bring actual practical results (CE, female, 40s). The shift in priorities towards externalising and disintegrating the more comprehensive SD-approach also played a significant part in not reaching the set goals. This is another reason why the claim of having mainstreamed SD is problematic: it justifies the premature shift of focus from the EU to developing countries, even though data clearly shows that SD aims had not been achieved in Europe. In addition, development is not a finished state, Europe keeps developing and has pockets of deprivation and wastefulness similarly to other well developed areas like North America or Australia. It has been rightfully argued that sustainability issues continue to be as relevant and as much intertwined in these regions as elsewhere in the world (Wilson et al 2009).

The processes observed among the governance cases give ground for speaking of significant changes in the development priorities of the EU. I suggest calling the period from 2001 to 2009 the "**European sustainable development decade**" (EU SD decade) to characterise an era of intense attention to developing, integrating and implementing the SD agenda in the EU and member states. The following decade from 2010 to 2020 could be described as "economising turn", as the integrated SD-agenda was silently simplified and political attention started to turn from home towards international SD-cooperation. Calling this paradigm change silent describes the gradual and vague way it took place. The experts added that the decline in relevance of the SD strategy is a sensitive subject on the EU level, so scrapping it is not discussed to avoid resistance.

Summing up this analysis and looking at the core themes and categories of the cases in the light of the present discussion, the following synthesised core theme and categories of the governance cases emerged. Economising turn is the core theme summing up the main SD-related process in current Europe. Green growth, social cohesion, climate protection, creative vision and vague responsibility emerged as key categories. Table 32 below gives an overview of the core categories along with their key properties.

**Table 32. Synthesis of the core themes and categories of the governance cases.**

| **Economising turn** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Vague responsibility** | **Green growth** | **Social cohesion** | **Climate protection** | **Creative vision** |
| Internationalising SD | Raising competitiveness | Equal opportunities | Mitigating global warming | Societal agreement |
| Narrowing the SD scope | Creating green jobs | Participation culture | Energy efficiency | Culture of sustainability |
| Need for open governance | Resource efficiency | Accessible education | Sustainable transport | Fostering reflexivity and responsibility |
| Dependence on the UN | Respecting ecological balance | Demographic viability | Sustainable consumption and production | Supporting research and innovation |

The results of the case study analysis condensed into core themes and categories can be considered as concise key narratives capturing the essence of each approach to sustainable development. Looking from this perspective, the previous subchapters have provided us the case study narratives so far: the German case tells a story about committed co-creation of good life by continuing commitment, developing an innovative creative vision, increasing social cohesion and ensuring changes in production and consumption for climate protection. In the German context culture was considered as culture of sustainability relevant for developing a creative vision and as participation culture needed to ensure social cohesion.

The Estonian narrative speaks about being in between business-as-usual and the ideal knowledge society development paths. For moving towards reflexive and responsible knowledge society, ensuring survival of the nation is considered crucial. Maintaining cultural viability is a necessary prerequisite to meet that aim. The economising turn strengthened and adjusted the current business-as-usual approach towards greener practices.

The Portuguese case tells a story about the need to build individual and state capacity to achieve green growth, which is considered the key to increasing wellbeing. This can be done by greening economy, supporting the raise of social cohesion and building state capacity, but also developing an open and cooperative governance culture.

The EU narrative tells a story about changing priorities towards externalising and economising SD by fostering sustainable economic growth and social inclusion while dealing with climate change,

vague responsibility and ownership issues. Considering the plurality of different cultures across member states, the cultural aspects were considered very hard to include in a development strategy.

The synthesised governance narrative tells the story of the economising turn in the development priorities of Europe resulting from vague responsibility. The priority areas are achieving green growth, raising social cohesion, working towards climate protection and supporting the development of a creative vision of a better, more sustainable development.

## 4.3.2. Analysis of the civil society cases

Each case in the civil society sample addressed a similar core concern with slightly different focus points, arguing that the current globalized socio-economic systems are wasteful and disconnected from reality, which makes them destructive and unsustainable.

The main ecovillage concern was disconnection from oneself, other people and nature, making people resigned, passive and irresponsible for their choices in life. Current educational systems based on the underlying worldview of separation were described as inadequate, producing people with a serious lack of awareness and practical skills for dealing with the complex challenges of our time. For the transition cases the main problems were the large scale and vulnerability of the global systems and the lack of positive visions and alternatives to the currently dominating grim story of human development. The globalised system was described as unresilient and disconnected, resulting in passive, individualistic and rootless people dependent on the consumer society, lacking practical Do-It-Yourself skills and power to make a difference. Concern for the wasteful systems and mindsets was the main concern of the LDI cases, involving the need to change the external as well as internal systems. Also here the habit of not taking responsibility and remaining a passive user was commonly seen as a result of the underlying disconnection between the mental and physical systems.

So the joint problem can be described as disconnection caused by the currently dominating globalised consumer society systems, facilitating wastefulness, lacking a positive vision and making the consequences of our choices abstract and anonymous. Table 33 provides the core themes and categories of the summarised GEN, TN and LDI cases.

**Table 33. Overview of the core themes and categories of the civil society cases.**

| | Civil society cases |
|---|---|
| **GEN cases** | **Reconnecting**: new culture, simpler responsible life, reviving community, educational reform |
| **TN cases** | **Relocalising for systems change:** positive vision, reviving community, restoring autonomy |
| **LDI cases** | **Counteracting waste(fullness)**: changing mindsets, LDI spirit, systems change |

The thematic focus, pace and scale of change differed across the cases. In terms of thematic focus, the GEN cases had the broadest spectrum of methods and solutions for facilitating sustainability transition in their repertoire. This stems from their wish to find more sustainable ways of living for different walks of life. As most ecovillages establish new living structures including buildings, gardens and social structures, they were facing the need to find new, better ways of doing things. However, the transition cases had also developed a wide variety of methods and processes, ranging from inner transition to urban gardening and setting up local currencies. The LDI movement was the most specialized initiative in the sample, primarily focusing on issues around waste reduction and the related awareness change. Accordingly, their toolbox for facilitating change was the leanest, containing practices and advice for cleaning up and counteracting physical waste, but also for changing the cultural patterns enabling wastefulness.

This different breath of desired change was probably one of the main reasons why the pace and scale of change differed across the cases. Whereas ecovillages and transition initiatives tended to stand

for a slower and gradual "*one heart at the time*" type of change, the LDI movement suggested an ambitiously fast pace of action. This difference can partly be explained by the much narrower thematic focus of the LDI initiative, which was expected to be reached faster. The difference also arose in terms of scale of change. All cases had local as well as global ambitions, but whereas the transition and ecovillage cases suggested starting on local and communal levels, the LDI cases wanted to achieve big-scale national and global changes fast – to clean a country in 1 day or the whole planet in 1 year. The GEN and TN cases had a more or less strongly expressed holistic approach suggesting that self-transformation and small scale changes can also make a big difference and transform the outer world. In this context, the slow pace and modest scope of change were not seen as obstacles. Instead, starting small was considered realistic and empowering, because it is doable and helps to avoid burnout. The LDI movement on the other hand relied much more on changing external conditions e.g. creating new legislation for achieving their aims.

Analysis showed that belonging to a certain group or network was a stronger influencer of the SD-approach than being located in a certain country. Belonging to a network also had correlations with the location of the initiative. For example, all three individual ecovillages in the sample were located in the countryside in rural settings and and all three individual transition initiatives were located in urban settings. This was the case even though both movements had intentionally broadened their membership definitions to be open to different types of likeminded initiatives regardless of their location.

Another distinguishing feature was the more or less stable nature of the initiative and the level of commitment it requires. The ecovillages and transition initiatives had a more stable nature, whereas the LDI initiatives mostly had a relatively small, often virtual core group of volunteers preparing for seasonal campaigns. The ecovillages were the most stable of the sample, involving a very resource intensive building up of new physical and ecological as well as socio-economic and cultural structures. The transition initiatives were also constantly active, but their activities mostly take place in existing structures, which makes participation less resource intensive and demanding. The LDI initiatives had the least stable nature and were focused on transforming a specific thematic field in the system. Accordingly, different levels of involvement and dedication were needed for participating in these movements. The ecovillages require the strongest and most longlasting dedication, whereas the LDI initiatives require the least commitment. People who joined ecovillages had usually made through a thorough life change involving the place of living, the job or field of activity, social connections and habits; all of which requires long-term commitment and deep, intentional dedication to the chosen way of life. Participation in the transition and LDI initiatives require less commitment as participants usually remain in their current homes, keep their jobs and circle of friends, just broadening their understanding, starting new activities and meeting new likeminded people. In both of these cases, the level of participation requires fewer changes in the way of life and the level of involvement is more flexible, also allowing for occasional or seasonal participation. This is reflected in the accepted modes of participation. Whereas GEN members mostly live and meet face to face in their developing communities, and TN members tend to have less intense, but still real life local contacts with likeminded people, the LDI members often meet and contribute to the movement online, as part of a virtual community, as people live hundreds or thousands of miles apart.

There were also differences in the sustainability of the initiatives themselves. For example, once the LDI initiatives have succeeded in building capacity and reflexivity to the level where their goals in counteracting waste and wastefulness are fulfilled, the movement would cease to exist, or likely, shift their focus to other similar ventures. With ecovillages the situation is different – they have been built

as homes for individuals and communities, so they would certainly continue to exist after their aims have been reached.

There were also many **similarities in the SD-approaches** across the cases. For example, all networks had developed a model for facilitating change in their desired area(s) of life. These models were relatively open and offered sets of tried and tested methods for facilitating change processes. However, even though these models had been implemented across the globe, the local settings were always new, so all the groups starting to use such methods were facing a lot of uncertainty. People joining these initiatives were willing to engage in real life experiments, learning by doing. In the face of this uncertainty, having frameworks with a positive vision and reliable methods with experienced likeminded people to communicate with was considered very helpful and supportive. The GEN SD-model involving social, ecological, economic and cultural dimensions of change was the most comprehensive in the civil society sample. Nevertheless, case study analysis resulted in different key aspects in comparison to that model. This is rooted in the open nature of the GEN's SD-approach whereby different intitiatives can be focused on different aspects in varying constellations to fit their local needs.

There was a shared conviction that changes towards more sustainable ways of life are unavoidable, not optional as the currently dominant course seems to suggest. All wanted to contribute to changing the current global wasteful systems. However, the extent of **systems change** aimed for by these groups varied from exiting or radically transforming the system to cooperatively re-designing certain parts of it. These more radical changes involved shifting away from the competitive and growth-oriented global fossil fuel dependent economy towards a cooperation-based relocalised economy that keeps money in the community. In all cases systems change involved not only material, but socio-cultural structures as preconditions for successful transformations as well.

All civil society cases emphasised the need for a **positive vision**, a new story, paradigm shift to a new culture, change of mind-sets or awareness change. All groups had positive and empowering visions of the future encouraging and motivating people by being meaningful and doable. All cases also agree that changes start on the individual level. The **awareness**-related concepts were included as key properties in almost all civil society cases, but with somewhat different meanings. All considered becoming aware and increasing awareness in daily life necessary for changing the mind-sets and achieving a successful SD-transition. Especially the ecovillage cases emphasised this aspect. Some transition groups openly included inner transition subgroups, while others did not. Most LDI-groups considered the need of changing the mindsets relevant, but this was not the central concern in most groups, happening rather as a synergetic side product of clean-ups. Awareness raising had to do with increasing knowledge, understanding and reflexivity in all cases. Whereas this covers the meaning of the concept for the LDI cases, for the ecovillage cases awareness also had further connotations. For example, there were many members who were engaged in awareness practices and introspective disciplines including yoga, mindfulness and other intrapersonal practices for inner transformation.

So what is involved in this new story or culture? The current culture or story that is believed to have caused the current crises is based on lack of respect for nature, leading to the utilitarian approach that humanity is entitled to use nature for its purposes, making depleting resources and extinction of species a natural by-product of human development. The driving forces are competition and the belief that a man is a wolf to other men, interested in selfish and immediate gratification. The new story involves respect for nature and a sense that everything does not have to be useful for humanity to be valuable and worth preserving on its own right. Humans are seen as participants in the web of life, not its owners, who should use only as much resources as they need for covering their needs. It is believed that a better and more sustainable way of human development needs a culture of cooperation and skills

for dealing with aggression without starting wars. Human nature is not considered selfish and competitive. The chances of thriving and innovating were considered higher when cooperating instead of competing.

This positive vision of a new culture with changed mindsets also opens the way the civil society groups understand sustainable development. There are several interesting features differentiating this approach from the governance approach, including the way the role of human being and our relations to the surrounding world are understood. Whereas the governance cases see development rather as a linear process towards improvement, the civil society cases, especially the transition and ecovillage cases, also find inspiration in the past. A good example here is their focus on re-s. Concepts such as reconnecting, reviving, reskilling or relocalising indicate that there were relationships and skills in the past that were useful and have been forgotten, and it makes sense to restore their use to advance towards more sustainable ways of life. In the synthesised civil society perspective, development is not seen as a linear process of improvement, but rather as a cyclical process. In the CS approach, innovations and solutions do not lie primarily in the sphere of technological innovation, but can also be found in traditional knowledge and experiences. The CS SD-approach often resembles indigenous people's vision emphasising the need to consider intra- and inter-generational needs of several generations ahead when making development decisions and including more than just human interests into the equation. The lack of inter-generational and intra-generational equity, which are among the biggest global problems, are believed to originate from disconnection from the web of life. Indeed, they also argue that currently not only the inter-, but also intragenerational needs are not being met, which is a major cause for the crisis. Another interesting feature is respect for the web of life inherent to the CS approach to SD. In some cases this respect had developed into deep awe of the miracle of life, which was even described as an experience of sacredness. In this light, not only other human beings, but life in general was considered the community that needs to be considered and taken care of to ensure sustainable development. In this approach people seemed to identify themselves as participants in bigger processes and exhibited a willingness to sacrifice their wellbeing to a certain extent for what they considered the general good. The CS vision is close to the strong sustainability approach, discussed further in Chapter 5.

**Education** in its various forms was considered relevant for facilitating both individual and cultural change. Education featured as a core concept only in the GEN cases, indicating the key priority that education was assigned in these cases. In the Transition cases this aspect was also relevant, but rather included as property under other categories, e.g. as reskilling under positive vision or restoring autonomy. In the LDI cases it was often included under broader properties like awareness raising, capacity building or changing mindsets. In all CS cases education included formal as well as informal education and lifelong learning means, such as learning from books or videos. Emphasis on education also included increasing the ability to be reflexive and have an open research attitude when seeking solutions for the complex SD-problems. All groups were open to different types of knowledge, most of all the ecovillage cases with their support for experiential and traditional indigenous knowledge, and the transition groups collecting stories and experiences from older people to learn about simpler living and reskilling. It reflects the belief that life was not so bad in the past, that there was a lot of valuable experience and knowledge that has gone missing and that we need to restore. Learning is seen as a mutual, not a one-way process. Such mutual learning was taking place also across networks. For example, TN members have commented that creating a joint educational program Transition to Resilience Training (T2R) enabled them to learn from ecovillagers who had more experiences with participatory change-making and organising of community relationships over a long time (Transition to resilience 2013).

Another characteristic aspect of the civil society approach to SD was the willingness to **take responsibility** for making a difference. Actions taken so far were not considered sufficient to address the pressing challenges of our time, so these initiatives encouraged taking responsibility to making the necessary changes happen. This proactive attitude they all shared is reflected in the LDI spirit, the call for transitioners for just doing stuff (Hopkins 2013) or the slogans "*We are the ones we have been waiting for!*" (Tamera) or "*Change yourself and the world around you changes*" (Lilleoru) in the ecovillage cases. Taking responsibility involved taking both personal responsibility for one's own actions as well as collective responsibility for the actions of others, having a respectful and caring attitude towards the surrounding world. For many people, becoming a member of one of these initiatives was connected to the desire to start walking their talk. For example, a lady moved to Sieben Linden ecovillage because she had done her best to live in an ecologically sound way, but had to admit that in the urban setting it was almost impossible, e.g. to avoid producing garbage. So to walk her talk and live with a clearer conscience, she moved to the ecovillage where all the processes from production to consumption are much more transparent and local. This opens the reason why relocalising is considered so important: in megasystems it is hard to know if production and transport of the goods is fair towards participating people and nature. In any case, global transport is not considered sensible. Relocalising systems helps to make these processes transparent, support local community, keep the money in the area, invest in quality instead of quantity and minimise waste.

Passivity was a point that many groups criticized: even when feeling unhappy with the way things are, being reluctant to make a difference and expecting someone else to take the lead. The people who had joined case study groups were already willing to take personal responsibility and make a difference. A sustainable way of living was related to having a long-term development perspective, not wasting and using more than needed, and disposing of things in a considerate and environmentally sound manner. It also involved learning from and respecting nature. This way of living was considered possible if people would be willing to develop a more low-impact lifestyle. So whereas the relatives and friends of people who had joined ecovillages or transition initiatives might view their decreasing consumption as a loss in the quality of life, for them the experience of living in an ecologically and socially interconnected way is a sort of luxury. For an LDI team member this willingness to live in simpler way was expressed by the choice of not flying to vacation once or twice a year, but making bike-trips instead: "*This is sustainability to me that I allow myself less luxury than I actually financially could for the sake of greater good"* (ED, male, 70s). However, the relationship to simpler living is culturally dependent. Due to the historical context, in Estonia many skills and practices which were marginalised in Central and Western Europe were not yet forgotten at the time of research and there were still many people who knew and collected edible plants, preserved fruits and vegetables and had the habit of sewing or repairing things. In Germany these skills were mostly lost some generations ago as the consumer society made it easy to buy things instead of doing them oneself – and buying new instead of repairing. Nevertheless, these skills are gaining relevance again, as reskilling and sharing living spaces or home appliances are en vogue among ecologically minded people. However, in Portugal sharing had the taste of poverty, so transitioners who tried to propagate such practices were facing cultural obstacles.

This approach of not taking more than needed, respecting the environment and other people, relocalising and being responsible for the consequences of our actions was also described as right livelihood. It also involves living in an ecologically sound way and preferring local or regional food, using local building materials and energy. Relocalising helps to make the production and consumption chains transparent. Humanity is considered a part of nature and the relevance of cooperating and learning from it is stressed. So adopting a simpler lifestyle is a central civil society response to

changing the wasteful consumer society. However, it cannot be said that it is the view of all CS members in the sample. For example, many LDI participants have probably never seriously considered these issues and might not be willing to adopt a simpler lifestyle. Nevertheless, the logic of being part of a community of life and seeking ways to cooperate with nature instead of fighting it or wasting its resources is part of the basic ideology shared by all civil society groups in the sample.

**Reconnecting to a community and learning new ways of communicating and cooperating** were further instrumental aspects for turning towards SD. Social isolation is a big problem in current societies, so finding a group of likeminded people is considered supportive and empowering. As traditional communities have become rare in modern times, reviving community is suggested as a solution to counteract the widespread disconnection. Reconnecting requires trust. In the approaches of the participating groups, trust is fostered by sharing similar values, information and experiences in an open manner. All cases in the sample exhibited mutual trust in collective intelligence, emergence and self-organising power of civil society initiatives. What holds people together are a shared vision and values; those sharing the proactive and open-access spirit of transition were seen as a community regardless of belonging to a specific group. This spirit was described as a positive and proactive, transparent, respectful and appreciative way of cooperating, creating synergy and a feeling of belonging that empowers. Such a cooperative spirit was also reflected in the way several interview partners either had close contacts or were members of more than just one CS group in the sample. Shared values also provided the foundation for the best partnerships with municipalities and businesses. Almost all civil society representatives interviewed for this study were volunteers and belonging to a group offered significant support in helping to regenerate and carry on. Despite cultural differences, it was argued that the spirit of transition is the same across different grassroots movements, empowering to take responsibility and keep making a difference. So reconnecting to other people by recreating community and building empowering networks of likeminded people was considered the path towards SD-transition by all cases.

Whereas it is difficult to achieve systems change as an individual, it was considered possible to achieve it as a group. The LDI movement, bringing together millions of people and making a big difference by cleaning up, is a good example of this. However, a shared vision alone is not enough to keep the community and cooperation running long-term. Tensions and conflicts arise when working closely in teams on complex issues. Especially the people in ecovillages have dedicated a lot of time for finding and developing ways for dealing with these intra- and interpersonal matters. Clear and non-violent communication and good cooperation skills, as well as mutual respect for diversity and a willingness to learn were considered essential for successful change-making on the long run. Diversity ensures resilience in nature and it is believed that it also helps to ensure social resilience and enrich the community.

As discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, many organisations and movements supporting the SD-agenda realised in the 1990s that being less confrontational and more prone to compromise offered more chances for finding common ground with municipalities, governments and other relevant stakeholders (Markham 2011: 589). All the CS groups in the sample had a cooperative approach – some were more active, others more reserved, but none were openly confrontational. However, it can be argued that the LDI movement began as a local "not in my backyard" (NIMBY) protest movement to counteract trashing nature. In a sense, many ecovillages and TN groups also started with the aim of counteracting certain developments in their local settings, such as losing touch or living in a disconnected way from nature, or wasting resources. However, even if there were some confrontational sentiments in some cases, these were forsaken and all groups had developed into so-

called YIMBY (yes in my backyard) groups with a compelling positive vision and a cooperative approach for achieving their aims. This does not mean that the CS activists had stopped to struggle with cooperation with power structures or businesses. However, working "from the belly of the beast" with local municipalities and cities, but also with national governments and EU structures (e.g. LDI) or with the UN (GEN) was considered wiser than avoiding it. It has been pointed out that NIMBY groups tend to be short-lived, dissolving after their goal has been reached or lost (Staggenborg 2007). Transforming from NIMBY to YIMBY groups by adopting a cooperative approach to realise a positive vision has probably helped the case study groups to last much longer.

Thus, all civil society cases in the sample focus on local change, but see a big potential for their vision and have practical models for facilitating a global transformation towards SD. All value a decentralised approach and concentrate their efforts on recreating community and raising awareness by sharing their experiences and knowledge gathered along the path. They encourage people to take responsibility by providing empowering and usable models of change, offering educational programs and, in the case of ecovillages and transition towns, developing practical, lived examples of alternative, more sustainable ways of living.

In summary, "reconnecting" emerged as the core theme of the civil society cases, summing up the main SD-related actions and ideas of the case study groups. Reconnecting expresses the central activity and direction of change that accounted for the patterns of behaviour relevant or problematic for those involved. On the personal level, it represented the need to reconnect to oneself, the surrounding reality and take responsibility for our actions. On the social level, it signified the need to break free from social isolation and restore connection to other people and learn how to live as a member of a community on the long-term. On the socio-economical and ecological level, it meant the need to change the wasteful globalised production and consumption systems that perpetuated inequality and destroyed nature, achieved by relocalising and downscaling the systems to the level that they become regional, transparent and less wasteful again. This also encompassed reconnecting to the local places and heritage, including skills for coping and thriving in given settings. Relocalising brings systems back to a human scale, so they cease to be overwhelming and facilitate taking responsibility for our daily choices. On the worldview level, it signified the desire to overcome what was perceived as the worldview of separation or disconnection culture – to rediscover human identity as an interconnected member of the web of life and act with corresponding respect and responsibility. So reconnecting emerged as a source of empowerment, enabling changing the mindsets and behaviours which were considered harmful.

As key aspects accounting for most of the variation in pattern and behaviour across the cases, cultural change, reviving community and systems change emerged as core concepts. The core concepts are the basic processes that engage actors, individuals as well as groups and institutions in a series of activities aimed at achieving more sustainable ways of life. Table 34 below gives an overview of the core theme with its core categories and key properties.

**Table 34. Synthesis of the core themes and categories of the civil society approach to SD.**

| **Reconnecting** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Cultural change** | **Reviving community** | **Changing wasteful systems** |
| Positive vision | Transition spirit | **Simpler responsible life** |
| Change of mind-sets | Empowerment through trust | Relocalising |
| Respect for nature | Cooperation skills | Restoring autonomy |
| Openness for learning | Valuing diversity | Minimising waste(fulness) |

The results of the case study analysis condensed into core themes and categoties can be viewed as concise key narratives capturing the essence of each approach to sustainable development. Below, the key narratives of the CS cases and their synthesised story are briefly presented.

The GEN cases tackle the main issue of disconnection and aim to change the destructive, unequal and wasteful consumer society resting on the worldview of separation by restoring connection. This involves reconnecting to oneself, to other people and the broader community of life to make a paradigm shift to a new culture supporting a simpler and more responsible way of life. To foster these transformations, educational reform is considered necessary.

The TN cases focus on relocalising as the solution for changing the unsustainable systems. This requires reviving community to increase autonomy and having a positive vision of the future to support cultural change. Relocalisation means that as more is done locally, the local economy and wellbeing of people is supported, less energy is needed thanks to shorter transport routes, allowing energy descent and a simpler life. Not being dependent on global systems and reconnecting to local systems is considered empowering.

The LDI cases aim to ensure a more sustainable development by counteracting waste and wastefulness. This involves reducing waste and pollution by changing the wasteful ways of thinking and behaving and making systematic changes in production, consumption and disposal practices. This can be done in a loose community based on a positive vision of a clean world, shared environmental responsibility, and empowering LDI spirit characterised by the willingness to cooperate to make a difference.

The synthesised CS narrative suggests that reconnecting is necessary to ensure positive long-term developments. To support these processes, cultural change, reviving community and changing wasteful systems were considered mandatory.

### 4.3.3. Summary of the case study findings

By discussing the ways the research participants from across Europe from different sectors understand and practice sustainable development, the essential answers were checked several times over and finally captured into core themes and categories of each case. Grounded in the results of iterative data collection, coding and analysis phases, the analysis progressed from specific cases to the network or union level and finished with articulating the core themes and categories shaping the SD-approaches of the civil society and governance actors in the sample.

The core themes and categories are essentially key processes that engage actors in a series of activities aimed at achieving more sustainable ways of life. In the current case, the two core themes sum up the main directions of the desired change: reconnecting or economising. To grasp the nature of the desired change, the core categories and key properties are helpful. Table 35 sums up core themes and categories along with key properties of the synthesised civil society and governance approaches.

**Table 35. Core themes and categories of the synthesised CS and GOV approaches to SD.**

| Level | Core theme | Core categories with their key properties |
|---|---|---|
| **CS** | **Reconnecting** | **Cultural change**: *positive vision, changing mind-sets, respecting nature, openness for learning*<br>**Reviving community**: *transition spirit, empowerment through trust, cooperation and communication skills, valuing diversity*<br>**Changing wasteful systems**: *simpler responsible life, relocalising, restoring autonomy, minimising waste(fullness)* |
| **GOV** | **Economising turn** | **Vague responsibility**: *internationalising SD, narrowing SD scope, need for open governance, dependence on UN*<br>**Green growth**: *raising competitiveness, creating green jobs, resource efficiency, respecting ecological balance*<br>**Social cohesion**: *equal opportunities, participation culture and sustainable communities, accessible education, demographic viability*<br>**Climate protection**: *mitigating global warming, energy efficiency, sustainable transport, sustainable consumption and production*<br>**Creative vision**: *societal agreement, culture of sustainability, fostering reflexivity and responsibility, supporting innovation and research* |

As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, these densely interconnected concepts can be read as narratives of current problems and proposed solutions. In this sense, the research progressed from studying the micronarratives of the individual cases[28] (in subchapters 4.1.1.1.-4.1.1.4., 4.1.2.1.-4.1.2.4., 4.1.3.1.-4.1.3.4., 4.2.1.-4.2.4.) over mesonarratives of networks (4.1.1.5., 4.1.2.5, 4.1.3.5.) to macronarratives summing up the SD-related experiences and views of the civil society and governance levels (4.3.1. and 4.3.2.). In the governance cases, the sample was much smaller, so forming a mesonarrative was skipped. This process of grounded conceptual analysis allowed moving gradually towards a more abstract understanding of the actors and the sustainable development scene in Europe.

The analysis so far (in subchapter 3.4 and Chapter 4) has been based mostly on primary data produced by the case study groups or by the author specifically for this research. In the context of the theory forming process in GT this means that the current findings are preliminary results. They serve the research process by delimiting the further theory building process to a couple of core themes and categories guiding further analysis in Chapter 5. To reach theoretical saturation, extant literature is included in the next chapter to deepen the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of these SD-approaches.

[28] Here, the networks were also considered as individual cases.

# CHAPTER 5
# A GROUNDED THEORY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPE

Chapter 4 ended with preliminary case study results, serving the research process by delimiting the further theory building process to a couple of core themes and categories guiding further analysis towards theoretical saturation. This makes it possible to fulfil the goal of grounded theory research and generate a theory that accounts for the patterns of behaviour relevant or problematic for those involved on the SD situation in Europe.

Reaching theoretical saturation is a point at which there are no new ideas and insights emerging from the data, only reoccurring patterns and strong repetition of already observed themes. The main research concerns can be accounted for and further sampling fails to add significant value to the study through new categories or properties. This allows developing a theory grounded in systematically and iteratively gathered and analysed data, exceeding the limits of a specific context.

Once theoretical saturation is reached, the core themes, categories and variables are weaved into an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses and probability statements about the relationship between the core themes and categories developed from empirical data, helping to understand the participants' main concern(s) and ways they use for trying to resolve it. Figure 12 below provides an overview of the grounded theory development process (quoted from Fernandez 2005: 48).

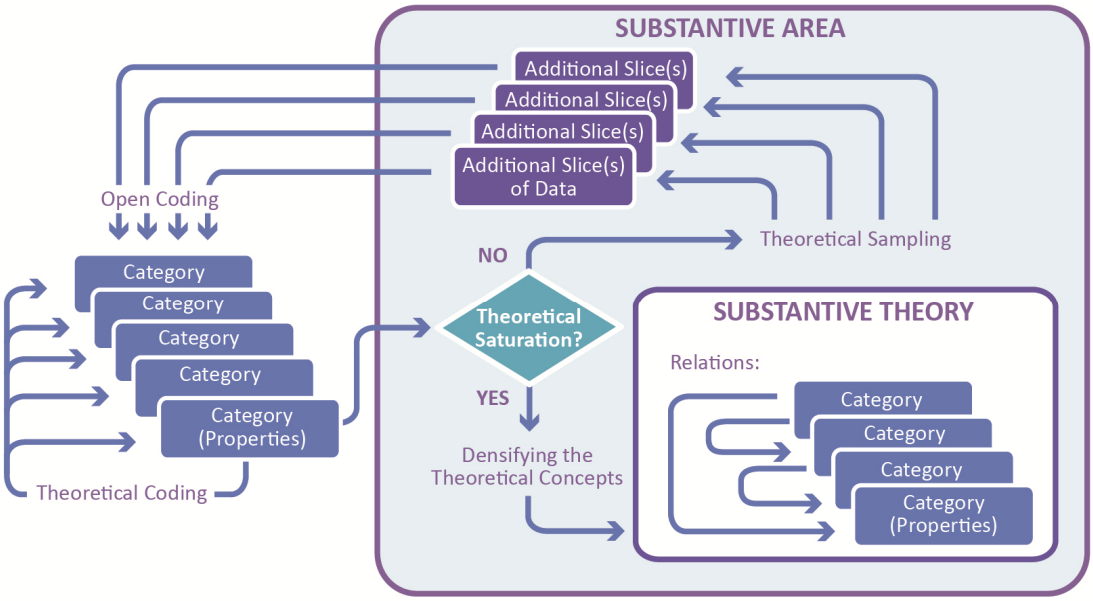



**Figure 12. Model overview of grounded theory development process.**

The final chapter reflects on all research questions, but special attention is given to the last three questions on main obstacles hindering cross-sectoral cooperation, the role of culture in SD transition and the nature of sustainability that the different approaches generate.

The chapter starts with the theoretical discussion enriching the preliminary findings on the civil

society (CS) and governance (GOV) approaches with extent literature. This leads to formulation of the grounded theory on the sustainable development scene in Europe and articulating two metanarratives of change. Next, the strengths and weaknesses of these SD-approaches are discussed and the main obstacles impeding cross-sectoral synergy are outlined. Finally, the relationship between culture and sustainable development (SD) is deliberated, finishing with reflection on the contributions and limitations of this research.

# 5.1. Theoretical discussion: approaching saturation

The core themes and categories of the CS and GOV cases resulting from the case study analysis represent the key processes that engage actors in a series of activities aimed at achieving SD. As such, they provide primary answers to the first research questions, explaining how the SD concept is understood and put to practice by the GOV and CS actors in the sample, which solutions for achieving a more sustainable future are seen and practiced by them, why has the progress of the SD-pioneer European Union (EU) slowed down considerably since 2009, if the SD-approaches depend more on the national context or belonging to a stakeholder group, and if the claim that SD has really been mainstreamed in the EU holds.

In order to reach theoretical saturation, analysis of the core themes and categories is continued below by including relevant extant literature as further data to be analysed. The GT methodology invites looking into other disciplines in the theory building phase to help to make the account denser. Below development approaches from ecology, political science, sociology, ethics, philosophy, economics and evolutionary biology relevant in the context of the case study results are included to advance the conceptualisation of the research account. This process of collecting data from multiple and different data sources as a means of cross-checking and corroborating evidence is also known as triangulation (Glaser 1998).

So in the following subchapters the existing themes and categories are discussed together with linking extent literature until a limited set of core themes and categories remain. Table 36 provides an overview of the case study results as the starting point for this discussion.

**Table 36. Core themes and categories of the CS and GOV approaches from the case study analysis.**

| Level | Core theme | Core categories |
|---|---|---|
| **CS** | **Reconnecting** | Cultural change, reviving community, changing wasteful systems |
| **GOV** | **Economising turn** | Green growth, vague responsibility, climate protection, social cohesion, creative vision |

The core themes “reconnecting” and “economising turn” capture the essence of the central processes that engage actors, individuals, groups and institutions representing the governance and civil society actors in the sample in a series of activities aimed at achieving sustainable development.

In the current case, the core themes represent two different directions of change. The GOV direction is achieving green economic growth by continuing globalisation, considering lack of economic growth as a problem for sustainable development. The CS approach, on the other hand, suggests reconnecting by relocalising as a solution for the main problem the political level is seen to perpetuate – disconnection. The GOV approach to development has a strong economic focus which has disintegrated the originally attempted balanced development of all three development dimensions. The CS level stands for the integrative approach to SD and also adds the cultural aspect. Indeed, the exclusion or inclusion of culture in SD considerations is a key issue in the following analysis.

These aspects interlink and overlap, but it is useful to distinguish between them for the sake of a richer analysis. They will be discussed in three thematic sections: direction of change, type of change and the role of culture in the change.

### 5.1.1. Narrative nature of sustainable development

The case study analysis demonstrated many different stories about the need for SD and ways of achieving it. Narratives were very present in the data gathered for this study. From one hand the way people argued for their truth on what is and is not sustainable development had a narrative form. In interviews and informal talks during fieldwork as well as in different kinds of written texts many different stories about SD were told. From the other hand the need for a new narrative, paradigm change, a positive vision or a new culture emerged across the sectors as a precondition for change. For example, whereas the Lilleoru ecovillage advocates paradigm change towards conscious awareness, the Estonian NSDS pleaded for a paradigm shift towards knowledge society (SE21 2005: 54). The German NSDS advocated creative vision (DE SDS 2002: 21), while the EU (EU SDS 2001: 2) and a number of CS cases called for a positive vision to realise SD. All these expressions ultimately point to the need to reconsider and change the underlying (or overarching) legitimating norms, beliefs, values and behavioural patterns to move towards more sustainable way of life, as the old way did not produce desirable results (any more).

At the end of the case study analysis, the CS and GOV approaches merged into macronarratives with specific ways of understanding the problems and solutions. Here, these macronarratives are analysed further by integrating the case study results with extant literature in order to reach theoretical saturation. This allows transcending specific cases and result in metanarratives of change that help to explain the SD scene in Europe and link it to international processes.

**Why use the narrative approach?** The narrative approach to studying SD issues allows discussing the core issues of the emerging theory in an interrelated manner. In the context of the predominantly quantitative SD research, the narrative approach helps to rehumanise the often too quantified sustainable development analysis, allowing also considering the emotive and qualitative facets.

During the research period, it became clear that the carriers of different narratives do not necessarily understand each other and often represent different subcultures. To make cooperation possible, translation between the different subcultures is necessary (Agar 2006). As discussed below, narratives are excellent for conveying meansings across stakeholders.

Human reliance on narratives for constructing and conveying meaning and making sense of the world has also been argued by numerous researchers and philosophers. Hayden White has suggested that the impulse to narrate is so natural to human nature that any report of the way things really happened inevitably takes a narrative form (White 1980: 5). Narratives have been described as cognitive methods for building identity and understanding personal actions and the actions of others (MacIntyre 1984, Väljataga 2008). As Alisdair MacIntyre put it: "*Because we understand our own lives in terms of lived narratives, the form of narrative is appropriate for making sense of the actions of others*" (MacIntyre 1984: 212). White has made a similar suggestion, arguing that narratives are essential for communicating meanings between people and (sub)cultures:

> *"Far from being a problem, then, narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific. We may not be able fully to comprehend specific thought*

*patterns of another culture, but we have relatively less difficulty understanding a story coming from another cultua new culturere, however exotic"* (White 1980: 5).

The ability to make situations understandable and facilitate mutual understanding across subcultures serves the purpose of this research: explicating the different interpretations of what SD is and where it should lead us to help representatives of different approaches to understand themselves and each other better, and to break the still present illusion of having a consensus and start seeking win-win solutions. The next reason for choosing the narrative approach is the hope that the narrative structure can help to broaden the perspectives of the governance and civil society participants to overcome their prejudices towards each other that often block cooperation.

It is relevant to add that many people use several narratives in their lives that can either overlap or contradict at times. However, as different narratives are usually used in different roles, this does not cause much chaos. The fact that the same high-ranking policy officer can express two varying opinions about the same matter in a couple of minutes as an employee and an individual illustrates how people represent different narratives in different contexts and roles. The observation that many people are part of several narratives has also been made by Carolyn Merchant (1995).

Analysis of governance approaches clearly showed that a change of narrative towards economising and externalising SD had taken place, especially comparing the period from 2001 to 2009 to the one from 2010 onwards. By most interviewed governance representatives this change was perceived with a certain worry, as most goals set in the SDS-s were not achieved before the economising and externalising turn changed the development priorities. In some cases this change was experienced with relief, as adopting the economised approach fitted well with overall practices facilitating the efforts. In these cases the loss of integrative approach was considered a reasonable price to pay for being able to achieve progress in issues compatible with the green growth narrative.

Most civil society cases had not perceived this gradual change of narrative and those who had, considered it a further shift towards deepening the belief that economic growth and technological innovations will solve the problems. The civil society representatives perceived the current culture as wasteful and destructive and the majority of circulating stories of the future scary or hopeless. So they argued for a paradigm change towards a new culture based on a new story with a positive vision of the future. In fact, a change of narrative was considered an essential precondition for turning towards sustainable development.

An interesting facet in both narratives was the underlying sense of urgency, expressed as survivalism. In the civil society narrative the survivalist aspect was stronger, although it was also expressed in some governance cases, especially in the Estonian case. The reasons for the fear for survival differed: whereas in the civil society cases it had mostly to do with fear for not doing enough to change the results of massive pollution and wastefulness and being uprepared for the approaching changes, on the governance level it was related most of all to survival as a nation due to declining and ageing population or the challenes of climate change. Changing the rhetoric from global sustainability to global survivability to better express the urgent need for changes has also been suggested by (former) UN SD officials Felix Dodds, Michael Strauss and Maurice Strong, arguing for putting forward a survival agenda as a bare minimum of policy changes that really need to be done (Dodds et al 2012). Another former UN associate Tapio Kanninen has also argued for replacing the concept of "global sustainability" that seems to imply that there is still time for adjustments with "global survivability", as the latter stresses *"the necessity of immediate and drastic change both in institutions and policies"* (Kanninen 2012: 3).

**What are metanarratives of change?** Although the research process helped to develop exceedingly abstract themes and concepts, they were still strongly grounded in specific cases and data. In the current chapter a further layer of abstraction transcending the local relationships is added. Including extant literature enables transcending the local contexts and speaking of globally existing overarching patters that can be described as metanarratives.

Metanarratives transcend individual and group discourses as well as cultural, geographical and national borders, uniting people with diverse backgrounds to similar ways of making sense of the world and acting in it. It also sets the way people understand their role and identity and the relationship with the world. In such a way, metanarratives bind people with similar worldviews together across countries and continents. Each metanarrative has a distinctive legitimising way of interpreting events and circumstances that provide structure to people's beliefs, gives meaning to their experiences and shapes the way they understand themselves and their role in the world. In the context of this study the metanarratives are understood in a similar manner to Jerome Bruner, who considers them as basic root texts of a given culture undergirding human science, literature, philosophy, everyday thinking, and even the sense of self (Bruner 1987a, 1987b). In this case two such root texts or metanarratives of change towards SD emerged as a result of the research process representing the CS and GOV approaches to SD in Europe.

The concept of "metanarrative" has been criticised as a concept whose time is over by prominent post/latemodern thinkers like Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault and Anthony Giddens. In late 1970s Lyotard, whose criticism made many people aware of the concept in the first place, argued that the postmodern era signifies the end of metanarratives as legitimising all-encompassing stories of reality (1979). Also Foucault criticised metanarratives as legitimising tools generated and supported by the power structures, dismissing the natural variety of things (Gutting 2007). Giddens suggested focusing instead on the "small pictures" that people can directly affect at their home, workplace or local community (Halpin 2003).

This research began with focusing on "small pictures" of individual cases. Gradually and cumulatively individual and community stories merged into overarching patterns forming distinct storylines, which merged with further storylines reaching the level of metanarratives that exceeded the local level. So this research argues that when looking at the European and global SD rhetoric and practices, it is inaccurate to claim the end of metanarratives. Fights over values and modes of securing good life are still very present and questions about the meaning of sustainable development, where it should lead us, how to change the currently unsustainable situation and which interest groups should benefit from these changes, are still highly current and contested. The mostly automatically and unreflexively accepted normative legitimising power of metanarratives has not disappeared and continues to shape individual and collective attitudes. Furthermore, the case study results show that metanarratives are not generated only by the power structures, but that different societal groups across Europe and beyond follow and construct mentanarratives as well. In this chapter the way that the two narratives that emerged from the case study analysis, the "economising turn" and "reintegrating turn", are analysed further and linked to two overarching metanarratives of change that they perfectly align with: the holistic and reductionist metanarratives of change.

## 5.1.2. Direction of change: scaling up or down?

Which direction should the change take to achieve sustainable development? The answers of the CS and GOV approaches differ considerably. The actions required for continuing economic growth and internationalisation are very different from actions supporting reconnecting and relocalising.

First of all – what is the **starting point of change?** The CS approach sees that change starts from the individual level with a shift in consciousness or change of mind-sets, reslting in more responsible and aware actions. Change is motivated by realising the need for it either through outer pressure or as a result of inner reflection. The individual is considered responsible for making the change happen – in cooperation with others, but starting with oneself. Change is expressed in processes and actions that support sufficiency, relocalisation and reconnecting to local settings. The GOV approach, on the other hand, is vaguer about the starting point: everybody is considered responsible, but this leads to ownership problems and dependence on international initiative, especially from the UN. The motivation for change is primarily external pressure, e.g. as regulations, subsidizations or through some type of crisis. Change is expressed in processes and actions that are more efficient and support green growth and global competitivness.

Another difference is related to the **perception of sources of progress and innovation.** Whereas the GOV approach tends to seek for innovation and progress from the present and the future, the CS approach also turns to the past experiences as a source of innovation, inspiration and improvements. This is reflected in the frequent use of re-s: relocalisation, reconnection, revival, reskilling, restoring etc. This relates to the way Carolyn Merchant speaks about recovery narratives (Schoch 2002). The "recovering Eden narrative" which is the mainstream recovery story used widely in the US on the governance level, science and economics, describes the fall from Eden in biblical times, followed by a long, slow recovery up to today. The GOV narrative reflecting the European context considers progress as a linear process of improving human conditions from the Stone Age to the present day – there are no traces of nostalgia for a lost Eden, rather a vision of a continuous improvement in the quality of life. So the GOV approach is not a recovery story, but a progress-oriented one. Merchant calls the second type of recovery narrative the "decline of nature narrative", used primarily by environmentalists, feminists and minorities in the US. It is a story about the need to preserve and conserve nature by replanting forests and restoring balance on the long run. Merchant argues that for the proponents of this narrative, humans have spoilt the Eden and now a rapid recovery is needed to save humanity and the planet in the 21st century. This is quite similar to the CS approach, arguing for the need to recover from the human-induced crises and restore the connectedness of the community of life that has been lost.

Different approaches to **limits to growth and resource use.** The European economies have developed towards globalisation and dependency on international financial networks. At this level of embeddedness, it is quite difficult to consider transitioning towards no-growth economy. As Merchant put it: global capitalism is the major problem of the current system, as it is structurally dependent on growth: the dependence on international complex systems and players to achieve growth makes it increasingly difficult to transform, or even envisage alternatives (Schoch 2002). For the governance participants in the sample the growth-logic was unquestioned. Even when the economising turn was considered too limited as a development perspective, there were no viable alternatives to the growth-centred development model. Economic growth is seen as a precondition for positive developments and good quality of life. Having no growth or even degrowth would bring about collapses in the current system, which in turn lead to poverty and chaos. The fixation on economic growth could be described as growth addiction. As no alternatives are seen, the governance level is hoping to keep the growth going with the help of increasing efficiency in resource use and technological innovations. This position is also supported by representatives of the ecological modernisation theory (Mol 1997). The

core problem here is the monopoly of one truth – there is no openness for considering alternative development options, which would be benefitial.

The CS cases consider the focus on economic growth and globalisation among the root problems for the sustainability crises. In line with the Malthusian logic, they argue that the overuse of resources has resulted in overshooting the natural limits to growth and will eventually lead to collapse of the systems and population. To minimise further damage and deal with the consequences, the CS approach argues for relocalising and downscaling the economies and ways of life. Economic growth is not considered obligatory for good quality of life – instead, many groups speak of no growth or degrowth as necessities for sustainable living. This would require relocalising the systems by reconnecting to community and reskilling to increase local autonomy and move towards greater self-sufficiency. No growth means returning to the human scales and a sensible way of life within the natural limits. It is believed that despite giving up much of what is considered comfort in our current Western societies, the quality of life does not need to drop. Whereas economic growth, even if it is greened, is not seen as the key to sustainable development, the qualitative growth in the sense of belonging, security and meaningfulness is considered relevant. There is research indicating that whereas the average incomes in intentional communities such as ecovillages might be significantly lower, the quality of life is slightly higher than in unintentional communities because of a greater cultivation and appreciation for other forms of capital, especially social capital (Mulder et al. 2006). For the representatives of the CS approach, systems change is not optional – it is believed that it will no longer be possible to uphold the growth-oriented systems and the transition to low-energy future is inevitable, either well prepared for or dramatic. To minimise the chaos accompanying the systems change, the CS actors have chosen to prepare for transitioning to a no-growth way of life.

The **strong and weak sustainability** dichotomy is helpful for contextualising these different approaches for ensuring that the present and future generations can fulfil their needs. The key difference lies in the accepted use of capital. The total capital is usually calculated as the sum of natural and manmade capital[29] with advocates of both camps agreeing that the total capital in an economy must not decrease over time for sustainability to hold (Ayres et al.1998, Schuller et al. 2000, Mauerhofer 2010). The decisive question is: is it acceptable to substitute the depleted natural capital with manmade capital or not?

The proponents of strong sustainability argue that resources are non-substitutable and each stock of capital must be maintained in its own right for sustainability to hold (Khalili 2011). According to this perspective, nature has an intrinsic value: nature offers more than just economic potential and manmade wealth and resources cannot compensate for the loss of natural beauty, arable land, pure water, forests or biodiversity. As assigning value is never an objective process, but always based on subjective preferences and interests, the strong sustainability perspective does not support substituting natural capital with manmade capital. This perspective is in line with the CS approach, seeing nature as intrinsically valuable and natural capital as not exchangeable.

The proponents of weak sustainability argue that the substitution of manmade and natural capital is acceptable as long as the total capital remains non-decreasing. The environment is seen as a reservoir of natural capital that is available for wealth creation, has a market value and is tradable. It is considered sufficient when future generations can be adequately compensated for any loss of natural capital by creating alternative sources of wealth e.g. through scientific innovation (Beder 1996). Under the economising turn, the governance approach has increased the emphasis on efficiency of resource use and made steps to decouple growth from resource use. There is hope that scientific and

[29] Whereas natural capital refers to the resources available in the environment such as ecosystem services, natural resources and natural beauty; manmade capital refers to manufactured resources and infrastructure.

technological innovation can come up with solutions for substituting depleted natural capital with manmade capital.

If everything has a price and the economic growth can resolve all other concerns, then SD issues boil down to a purely economic debate about efficiency and substitution. If, on the other hand, substituting natural resources with manmade capital is not considered sufficient for ensuring equal opportunities for the present and future generations, then we must step outside the conventional market framework to find solutions.

**T**he **sufficiency-efficiency** dichotomy also helps to open the different approaches to resource use. J. Huber (2000) differentiates between the sufficiency approach as the NGO approach and efficiency approach as that of the majority of the industry, business and governance actors. The efficiency approach is also shared by the governance participants in the sample. It gained ground during the European economic crisis that started in 2007, paving the way for the economising turn at the end of the decade. As an approach also propagated by the adherents of the ecological modernisation theory (Mol 1997, 2009), the "efficiency revolution" is considered a means to allow for further economic growth and ecological adaptation of industrial production by improving the environmental performance. In addition to labour and capital productivity it aims to improve resource productivity.

The sufficiency approach heads towards *"self-limitation of material needs, withdrawal from the free world-market economy and an egalitarian distribution of the remaining scarce resources"* (Huber 2000: 269) to achieve SD. Such voluntary simplicity calls to mind the direction that the CS level is heading towards by relocalising, reskilling, reviving community, popularising sharing and repairing to downscale the resource use and the environmental impact. In that spirit many civil society actors in the sample were preparing for a smooth transition period to a simpler life, willing to give up much personal comfort for the sake of the common good. This also links to the **simplicity-complexity** dichotomy discussed by Ted Trainer in the context of the ecovillage and transition movements (2000, 2002, 2006), whereby the CS approach fits the simplicity and the GOV approach the complexity logic.

Which approach to the limits to growth and resource use is right depends on the viewpoint and can be described as a moral issue. The ecologist Garrett Hardin has argued that it is no longer sufficient to rely on technological advances to provide indefinitely for the future (1986). Instead, he argued for stopping the tragedy of the commons whereby nobody takes responsibility for paying the full cost of the use of public goods and resources. This can be done by taking a moral stance to maintain public resources in the context of overuse of natural resources. This links to the line of reasoning of the authors of "The Limits to Growth" report (Meadows et al 1972) arguing that under the unrestrained economic growth economies would one day crash due to earth's finite resources. This strong sustainability, sufficiency and "limits to growth" line of reasoning has also been informing the voluntary simplicity and relocalisation movements and the more recent degrowth movement, which all have ties to the case study groups.

**The scales of change** are different and differently evaluated. For the CS approach, downscaling means returning to the normal scales and a sensible, much simpler way of life that fits within natural limits. Downscaling includes relocalisation, reconnecting to the local place, nature, culture and community, reskilling to become more self-sufficient and less dependent on money. It also involves energy descent and adapting to a simpler, low-energy way of living based on the sufficiency principle. Furthermore, it presupposes no economic growth or even degrowth. This downscaling model can be summed up as the sufficiency-oriented downscaling model embedded in local or regional settings. It is argued that while it is crucial to keep the global context in mind, action is always local: *"If we just want to have it on paper, there's no problem, then we can do it on the regional or national level. But if we really want to*

*have a more sustainable society, it means getting people on board and the only level to do it is on the local level"* (AF, male, 50s).

For the GOV approach, downscaling is not an option for serious discussion, as it would include a serious breakdown of systems that would contradict the development aims of this approach. Upscaling involves globalisation and in relation to that, a certain degree of disconnection. For example, under the free trade agreements, it is often prohibited to favour local producers to avoid discriminating against other businesses. Economic growth is not considered optional, it is imperative. The lifestyle does not have to become simpler; one is expected not to consume less, as this would be detrimental to growth – consumption should become greener and resource use should not increase in production. Despite this, the energy demand is likely to continue to grow, but it should be as clean or green as possible. This approach can be summed up as the efficiency-oriented upscaling model.

The **right direction**, downscaling or upscaling, is also a question of which future is predicted. Whereas the civil society level presumes that the current petroculture societies cannot continue in the long run due to the peaking of resource reserves, which in turn makes them much more expensive and necessitating preparation for the inevitable energy descent, the governance level presumes that the development will be more stable and that new resources and energy sources will be created via technological innovation, enabling a smooth transition.

The upscaling model relies on big businesses, for which sustainable economics has been suggested as a profitable direction of development. However, as the governance representatives also admitted, the interest of the business sector is unstable: if the sustainability aims are profitable, progress is made, but when the situation changes and they cease to be profitable, there is a high probability that the businesses will return to business-as-usual. This further underlines the vagueness of responsibility of the upscaling model. As discussed in subchapter 3.4, already in the 1970s the more substantial actions in Europe to address the spreading environmental concern due to excessive attention to economic development were largely triggered by the UN and the UN has remained a relevant source of motivation.

The downscaling model relies on local, often small businesses, where transparency about the products, their life cycle, working conditions, etc. is much greater. When people are following the CS approach of taking responsibility, their businesses follow SD principles based on conviction and sufficiency, not on profitability, which means that they are more likely to stick with their chosen development direction in the long run. The motivation on this level is less dependent on outer pressure and the actors can be described as self-motivated.

### 5.1.3. Interconnected or fragmented approach to SD?

In nature, disconnecting and reconnecting are constantly reoccurring processes that make life possible. As such, one is not better or more significant than the other; the problems arise when one development direction dominates and marginalises the other, resulting in one-sided development.

In the context of this research the disconnecting - reconnecting dichotomy describes different strategies for change. Reconnecting refers to restoring a connection which has been lost for some reason. On the civil society level, disconnection was perceived as the main problem causing unsustainability. Anonymous globalised systems facilitating disconnection were also seen as sources of pointlessness, harmfulness and social isolation. Restoring connection with oneself, with nature, with community, with local place and culture is considered the way towards a more meaningful, balanced and fair way of life. Reconnecting also involved refocusing economy on the local context and reskilling to prepare for a simpler, less wasteful and more self-sufficient way of life. In this manner,

reconnecting has a restorative nature and lends a certain sense of belonging and security. The interconnected perspective of the CS approach is common to ecology and to some extent, biology. The physicist Fritjof Capra has expressed this interconnectedness eloquently by stating that all living systems are networks of smaller components, and the web of life as a whole is a multi-layered structure of living systems nestling within other living systems – networks within networks (Capra 1996).

Disconnection, on the other hand, implies ending a connection which has existed. Disconnection creates a distance to nature or the environment, to other people, places and cultures. It involves the habit of approaching events and processes in a separated manner, disconnected from each other. While this type of development can be faster and more efficient, the broader impact of such actions is often unknown and can be rather harmful. The disconnected approach to development shared by many representatives of the governance and profit sectors and is also quite prevalent in sustainability research. It was also shared by the governance actors in the sample. I argue that this approach has become too dominant, resulting is excessive focus on quantitative aspects, leaving too little room for the qualitative considerations that create meaningfulness in human lives.

It has been argued by a number of researchers that disconnection is an inevitable side-effect of modernity. As the political scientist Karen Liftin put it: the current crisis and disparity between the North and the South along with inequality, destructive pollution and the feverish pursuit of security that seems to generate only greater insecurity, is an inescapable dark side of modernity (2003). Modernity is associated with the decline of traditional social ties, as social actions have become increasingly spread across time and space. The sociologist Anthony Giddens has used the **disembedded-embedded** dichotomy to describe this process of human separation from nature in the Western world since "disembedding" in the first half of the 20th century (Giddens 1991). When something is disembedded, it is moved from a concrete and local context to an abstract or virtual state. As such, globalisation requires disembedding in order to integrate people all over the world into a shared system of communication, production and exchange. According to Giddens, being (or feeling) disembedded from time and space is characteristic to the late-modern society. The opposite is re-embedding, which characterises the direction of change that the civil society groups strive for.

Although not explicitly framing their discussion in the modernity-post-modernity framework, also Max Weber, Lynn Townsend White Jr., Anson Rabinbach and Jaan Kaplinski focus on the same period when discussing the roots of the current socio-ecological crises. As causes for the disconnection from nature, they emphasise the Christian and capitalist mind-sets and industrial revolution. Anson Rabinbach brings in a relevant point reasoning that the current disconnection developed along with the new energy-centred discourse in the 19th century, resulting in a major change in the worldview and way of life (1992). Whereas before, man was considered the son of God with transcendental goals, with the birth of energy-centred discourse, the mechanistic worldview gradually took over and man became just one transformer of energy among others, not the central transformer (Rabinbach 1992: 2). These processes were also reflected in changes of language use. The etymology discussed in Chapter 3 showed how the older concept "nature" became gradually replaced by the younger concept of "environment". Kaplinski has described this shift as moving from "nature" as a self-organising system that humanity was a part of to talking about "environment" as something that surrounds people (Kaplinski 2003: 9). Whereas nature did not have a centre, environment has a centre – the living being that is environed. Thus he considers the resulting anthropocentrism almost inevitable, as species-centeredness is common in nature (ibid). This observation is supported by the literary scholar Leo Spitzer, who adds that whereas the concept of nature included both outer (material, visible) as well as the inner (invisible, psychological, spiritual) spheres, the concept of environment focuses on the outer sphere (1942: 204-206). The outer environment is seen as something

that humans can control by managing the spaces, making them cleaner, safer, and more pleasant, whereas the inner nature seems too individual, complex and lucid to control. So this shift in the worldview and language use characterises the disconnection and externalisation process which has led to objectification of nature as something separate from humans.

This is mirrored in the logic of White and Kaplinski arguing that Christianity's victory over paganism, coupled with the novel "marriage" between science and technology from 1850 onwards turned away from seeing all natural objects as animated and revered, substantially lessening respect to nature and creating grounds for the development of a uniquely anthropocentric utilitarian approach to nature. Similarly to Rabinbach, White describes this change as the greatest psychological revolution of our culture (White 2008: 43). Although the 20th and 21st century have been described as post-Christian, White believes that the thought and language patterns and behaviours of perceiving humans as separate and higher from the rest of nature, are still largely the same (White 2008: 44). This is in line with Kaplinski who has argued that the deeper causes of contemporary environmental problems lay in the historically developed worldview of the industrialised North (Keskpaik 2008: 13-14).

Referring to the processes leading to lessening respect for nature and the development of the anthropocentric and utilitarian approach, the philosopher and science historian Carolyn Merchant has also argued that the scientific revolution changed the perception of the living Mother Nature from a respected entity to dead matter – a change in ethics she calls "the death of nature" (Merchant 1980):

> *"If nature is dead, and humans are external, humans are engineers, and the image appears of God as a mathematician and engineer. Then people can manipulate and manage nature, without having to propitiate nature, and without nature retaliating"* (Schoch 2002).

To distinguish the new worldview from the organic perspective, Merchant calls it mechanistic. She argues that the mechanistic perspective has become the dominant ideology of capitalism, giving permission to exploit and dominate nature, resulting in the present ecological crisis.

Discussing the level of worldviews, the concepts of culture, narratives and mindsets are often used. For example, White considers the ecological crisis the result of an emerging, entirely new culture characterised by unprecedented anthropocentrism. This new culture has the understanding of linear time and constant progress, unknown in previous times, which makes him doubt if it is able to survive its own influence. He also doubts that more of the same approach, i.e. more technology and more science, will help to find a way out of this complex situation. Instead, he suggests adopting a new set of basic values, a new paradigm, or a new religion, which would cast aside the often implicit, but continuously underlying assumption that the value of nature depends on its use value to human beings. Unless that happens, he considers the survival of the democratic culture highly unlikely (White 2008: 37). This is, of course, in alignment with the CS perspective.

However, the reconnected and disconnected development directions do not only exist as dominant ideologies of certain periods. In uncertain times, different strategies for coping with uncertainty are cultivated and as the case study analysis clearly showed, there are groups that support these strategies for change even in the current times. Whereas reconnecting aims at cooperation and trust, the disconnecting narrative aims at competition and control as keys to success. In the current context of multiple crises and heightened sense of uncertainty, where the ecological processes are unforeseeable, it is tempting to perceive the problems as something that the human intelligence can control with smaller adjustments to keep the "Spaceship Earth" (Ward 1966, Jasanoff 2004) in check. As major natural catastrophes have shown over and over again, that control is rather limited. Having control is also often an illusion that helps to maintain the legitimacy of the system. Unlike the governance level, the civil society narrative allows for admitting not knowing and not having control. Furthermore, openness and an experimental attitude are considered strengths that lend resilience. As the civil society

approach to change is open-ended, emerging and constantly evolving, uncertainty is not considered a negative thing, but something that allows responding to the situations as they arise in the best possible way. This is exemplified in the trust in networks, collective intelligence and emergence.

These differences can be summed up in the self-organised-controlled dichotomy. As discussed above, the GOV development approach tends to consider environment as something external that needs to be controlled and managed, whereas the CS approach focuses on finding ways to best participate in nature as a self-organising process. The evolutionary biologist Elisabeth Sahtouris suggests that these different approaches are not only characteristic to certain periods, but continue to exist and influence humanity also in the current times. Similarly to Merchant she uses the **mechanistic-organic** dichotomy to distinguish between these development directions. Sahtouris describes the organic development model as self-organising and autopoietic, i.e. a system that reproduces and maintains itself, and the mechanistic model as presupposing outer control and allopoietic, i.e. a system that produces something other than the system itself (2009). According to her, the organic development vision of living Earth is self-created, self-sufficient and self-organising, negotiated and self-repaired if needed, which fits the CS perspective. On the other hand, the mechanistic model is inventor-created, has a hierarchical structure and top-down command, linking to the description of earth as Spaceship Earth. In the mechanistic perspective, systems are engineered and repaired by experts. Also the *raison d´etre* of the systems differs: while the mechanistic model exists for products or profit serving the owner's self-interest, the organic model exists for health and survival of the ecosystem at large.

Whereas modernity and the GOV approach that seems to carry a largely modernist spirit discard traditions, the CS approach sees it as a source of inspiration. For them, reconnecting and re-embedding are a way of coping with uncertainty. Whereas the mechanistically oriented GOV approach seems to turn to the future to seek inspiration, the civil society actors also turn to the past as a source of knowledge and inspiration. This is clearly indicated by the frequency and relevance of "re-"actions like reconnecting, relocalisation, reviving, reconciliation, reskilling in the CS approach. These seem to provide security and assurance, as these methods have worked in the past. In a way, the CS approach characterised by the strong sustainability stance could be described as more conservative. Conservative tendencies are often activated in times of crisis and rapid change to deal with the uncertainty.

Another dichotomy that links with the disconnecting-reconnecting and modernist-postmodernist dualities is the distinction between **holistic** and **reductionist** approaches to development. This has been observed and described by political scientist Karen Liftin and biologist Brian Goodwin. Relying on the systems thinking perspective and referring to Luhmann (1990), Liftin criticises the reductionist approach arguing that the seemingly separate issues that constitute the global problematic cannot be effectively addressed in isolation (Liftin 2009: 126-127). Goodwin also criticises the widely spread neodarwinist and reductionist viewpoint that sees humans as gene-driven and determined survival machines. He argues that the reductionist viewpoint leaves too many aspects unnoticed; unlike the systematic holistic approach that sees meaningful and causal interconnections where the reductionist perspective sees random coincidences (1995). In the context of this study, reductionism expresses itself in the dominance of economic growth, leaving unnoticed many aspects that did not serve this aim. The holistic nature of SD approach is well characterised by the quotes "*If life wins there will be no losers"* by Dieter Duhm (Tamera) and "*Change yourself and the world around you changes*" by Ingvar Villido (Lilleoru).

Liftin has argued that these different approaches can be viewed as historically and contextually specific stories (2003: 36), describing this dichotomy as the postmodernist perspective

with holistic ontology vs the modernist approach with reductionist ontology (2003). She estimates that from a holistic perspective, the social and environmental consequences of the modernist story make it an increasingly unviable one, thereby necessitating new ways of living with a sense of deep connection to the human and biotic community (Liftin 2003: 36). She considers taking a systemic approach to the global problems necessary and supports the way civil society movements seek to address the interrelated problems of social alienation and ecological degradation by building sustainable communities locally that are linked to global networks for education and social change.

According to Liftin, the modernist reductionist story is about the triumph of human reason and rationality over superstition and nature, and as a progressive march towards the material liberation of humanity. She argues that the metaphors informing the modernist story are mechanistic in nature. As mentioned above, Liftin finds it problematic how the reductionist approach tends to tackle the problems separately in an unrelated manner. One example of this from the case studies comes from Germany, Sieben Linden. The local government wanted to store gas underground in the holes made by prior mining activities. The locals were worried that this might ruin the ground water and cause a wide range of connected problems, but the governance level felt the political pressure to make a decision to be able to say that the issue has been taken care of. The pressure from Sieben Linden to inquire the wider implications before taking action was successful in the end and the plan was altered, but the tendency to tackle problems in an unrelated manner to reach faster decisions was strong. This tendency is probably also supported by short election circles. The postmodern and holistic story is about cooperation, uses organic metaphors, values integration rather than segregation and sees the role of humans in wise husbandry of resources. Next to the rational considerations this approach allows room also for aesthetic and emotive considerations. The conceptual underpinnings of the holistic stance lie in a systemic view on things and processes and commitment to radical interdependence.

The holistic and reductionist approaches to development observed by Goodwin and Liftin are close to the way the evolutionary biologist Elizabeth Sahtouris has described organic-mechanistic development models (2009). She claims that the current story of creation describes the development of life on Earth as a series of random coincidences and mutations. Sahtouris argues that living in a small planet which will be burned by the Sun sometime in the future and having been evolved as a result of coincidental mistakes in the DNA leaves humanity without a meaningful place and purpose, which does not inspire or encourage. Similarly to Goodwin and Liftin, she does not tackle the issue of meaningfulness explicitly, but also from her arguments the meaningful-random dichotomy can be extracted. Sahtouris suggests that the world needs a new story because the current stories are confusing, incomplete or negative, producing a confusing, incomplete and negative life (Sahtouris 2009: 6). She offers an alternative story where Earth is seen as the living organism Gaia (cf. Margulis 1997, Lovelock 2000) and where humanity cooperates with other organisms. Sahtouris maintains that evolution functions as a spiral with repeating phases of unity, distinction, tensions, conflict, negotiations, cooperation and a new level of unity and encourages people to increase the level of cooperation to speed up the arrival of the new phase of cooperation (2009: 8-9).

The call by Sahtouris is in tune with the SD-agenda calling for more cooperation to achieve sustainable development. Her views have significantly influenced some leading figures from the LDI and GEN movements in the sample. The reconnecting-disconnecting dichotomy also encompasses different approaches to cooperation and participation. The time when environmental and peace activists committed fierce acts of civil disobedience and refused to be civil with the governance representatives is largely over – at least the civil society groups included in this thesis have all adopted a cooperative and non-confrontational approach. GEN has described this way of change-making "acting in the belly of the beast". For cooperation and participation, connection is needed. Partners have to be able to understand each other to exchange relevant information and find ways for bridging

gaps. The CS and GOV levels have different cooperation strategies: whereas the civil society attempts to create self-organising cooperation on an equal basis, the governance side prefers participation controlled from the top, following some pre-constructed guidelines. The civil society organisations tend to be too fragmented to have a strong enough voice, making the businesses with their institutionalised lobbying groups more convenient cooperation partners. This also explains to some degree why economic concerns have made it to the forefront of the political agenda.

An interesting aspect relating to cooperation and participation issues is the role of communities in achieving sustainable development. Ferdinand Tönnies suggested way back in 1887, carried by the spirit of modernism, that the time of communities is over as the time of societies has come (1988: 20). However, the importance of communities in realising the SD agenda has been emphasised since the emergence of the SD discussion in the 1980s. Both GOV and CS levels argue that the most significant changes on the way to sustainable future will have to happen in communities. However, the scale and character of communities they have in mind, when using the concept, differs. For example, according to the governance approach, the change would be managed and coordinated by the governance representatives, whereas the civil society networks see it initiated and facilitated by smaller, locally-based groups.

The CS actors in the sample work on building up new types of communities – intentional communities, to live in a more sustainable manner. Reconnecting is the central activity for finding identity, a sense of belonging and meaning to counteract rootlessness and uncertainty. Such communities are characterised by a heightened awareness on the impact of one´s choices and include also virtual communities of likeminded people living far from each other. Humans are perceived as intimately connected with nature and other living beings. This understanding of sustainable community is in line with how Fritjof Capra described it: *"A sustainable human community interacts with other living systems – human and nonhuman – in ways that enable those systems to live and develop according to their nature"* (2002: 215). The feeling of being disconnected from the world is considered a destructive illusion.

The governance level tends to consider a group of people who share a place of residence a community – the current EU was called the European Community for decades. In the renewed EU SDS from 2006, sustainable communities are defined as units *"able to manage and use resources efficiently and tap the ecological and social innovation potential of the economy, ensuring prosperity, environmental protection and social cohesion"* (EC 2001: 3). For the government level, local communities are primarily seen as local managers of resources according to commonly agreed principles and practices. On the global scale, the whole EU can be considered a local community. For the civil society initiatives, "local" primarily signifies a neighbourhood, or area of like natural phenomena and climate, linked by water, culture, ridges and valleys, or local recognition, the perceived broader neighbourhood.

## 5.1.4. Cultural aspects: qualitative-quantitative

Research shows that the differences in terms of SD perception and practices in many ways boil down to cultural aspects. Supporting growth or degrowth, downscaling or upscaling, reconnection or disconnection, holistic or reductionist development depends on what values are considered relevant and true by representatives of certain (sub)cultures. Keeping in mind that SD is not a neutral, but a normative power-concept and that realising it requires broad ownership and participation, it is relevant to consider the voices of the powerful (governance level) as well as those of the less powerful (civil society level) and question what shapes their perceptions of sustainable development. Supporting the view of culture as a power concept, the cultural heritage researcher Graham Fairclough has argued: "*A*

*few things in human life are more powerful than ideas and concepts, and culture is one of the most influential in all walks of life*" (Dessein et al 2015: 20). What role does culture play in shaping the distinctly different and at times, opposing approaches to sustainable development?

**The relative nature of equity and needs.** Ensuring inter- and intragenerational equity and fulfilment of needs is one of the most burning issues on the SD agenda for both approaches. The use of the concept of needs seems to indicate that all people in present and future generations have the same basic needs that must be taken into consideration. However, these needs that should not be compromised for development to be sustainable have remained largely unspecified. Based on the analysis so far I claim that SD cannot be understood without knowing cultural context, as the central concepts like "needs" or "equity" are culturally dependent. The standards of living and, accordingly, the perceived needs differ greatly on the individual level within one culture as well as interculturally. For some, adopting the sufficiency approach of a simpler living is a need considering the global situation, whereas for the next person being able to fly to summer and winter holidays and get monthly new technical appliances is a need. Furthermore, what is the measure of rightfulness of our needs? Does it depend on how much we can afford or on ethical considerations? In democracy it is generally considered that as long as meeting one's needs does not harm others or compromise their ability to fulfil their needs, there is freedom of action.

Thus, equity is a highly normative and context sensitive concept. Relying on the liberalist ideology that states that economic growth benefits all participants, the GOV approach suggests efficient resource use, green growth and continuing globalisation as ways towards more equity. On the other hand the CS approach, closer to ecologist ideology, argues for relocalisation, no growth/degrowth and sufficiency as keys to restoring equity[30]. Presently, despite greening growth and attempting to decouple it from resource use, we have both intragenerational and pretty likely also intergenerational inequity because the biodiversity loss, big-scale pollution and depletion of natural resources mean that the future generations cannot enjoy the same conditions and stand a risk of having a poorer, environmentally and aesthetically degraded world to live in. Furthermore, there are influential voices representing the developing world arguing that the currently dominant global liberal economic regime along with structures like the WTO perpetuates inequality, suffering and violence (e.g. Shiva 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009).

**Starting point: inner or outer sphere?** The inclusion or exclusion of culture is also related to representing the holistic or reductionist approach, as discussed in the previous chapter. A good example here is the perceived starting point of the SD transition according to the CS and GOV levels.

For the GOV level the starting point is external: changes in political, social and physical structures expressed in changing practices and behaviours to become greener, more efficient, competitive and innovative. As a rule, on the governance level the worldview-related aspects were not discussed or explicitly included in SD considerations. "Culture" appears in development strategies and documents mostly in the form of agri-, aqua- or silviculture, or in some cases as indigenous culture, in the context of cultural heritage, tourism, migration or cultural diversity. It also appeared in the context of finding ways to regulate behaviour, e.g. changing consumption culture or organisational and political culture, or as a means of creating more efficient cooperation practices (cooperation culture). The Estonian and German cases were exceptional in that they explicitly described the role of culture to SD, arguing that for achieving SD the past trends cannot be simply continued and new directions need to be found. They argued for the strategic relevance of ensuring strong and viable cultural life by

[30] The question if equity is something that has existed in the past and can be restored, is another issue.

facilitating participation in and funding for culture and protection of cultural heritage. In these cases, culture was primarily understood as a means of ensuring national survival or a means for ensuring national wellbeing. Quoting the German NSDS:

> *"SD is more than a technocratic route to efficient methods of business, production that does cause waste, and a healthy life…. SD has a lot to do with the imaginative and creative vision of how we want to live in the future. In this sense, it is a creative task, which challenges the creative potential of our society on the basis of values, social models and our cultural tradition as a whole" (DE SDS 2002: 21).*

However, in other governance cases the role of culture was marginal and instrumental. As the German expert noted: culture of sustainability still needs to be built up. The GOV level tends to focus on tangible, visible and quantifiable outer processes like built environment, pieces of art or institutionalised social structures. This is problematic, because it leaves aside much of what makes up human life, structuring and giving it meaning. Consequently, the role of culture as a factor facilitating or hindering the change processes has received too little attention so far in academic as well as policy approaches.

For the CS level, the starting point of the SD transition is in the inner world: change starts with raising awareness and changes in the mindset, leading up to change of paradigm or a new culture with a new narrative and a positive vision of the future (e.g. peace culture in Tamera). The CS representatives often use the argument assigned to Albert Einstein: as the present way of thinking has caused the problems, it cannot bring solutions, because a system cannot be changed from the same level of thinking that created it. So it is suggested that a new way of thinking, a paradigm change or a new narrative needs to be adopted to achieve the desired change. The need for a new way of thinking about the current situation has also been suggested by Merchant (1995), Liftin (2003) and White (2008).

These differences in the starting point of change can be summed up into the inner-outer dichotomy. Next to the qualitative-quantitative distinction and tangible-intangible dichotomy it is helpful for analysing the interplays of culture and sustainable development.

The Earth Charter provides a telling example of change in priorities in terms of including or excluding cultural aspects. As discussed in Chapter 3, tackling intangible values has been in the European agenda for change since 1972, when the participants of the Paris European Summit argued that for reducing disparities in living conditions, the intangible values deserve special attention:

> *"Economic expansion is not an end in itself. Its first aim should be to enable disparities in living conditions to be reduced. It must take place with the participation of all the social partners. It should result in an improvement in the quality of life as well as in standards of living.* ***As befits the genius of Europe, particular attention will be given to intangible values and to protecting the environment, so that progress may really be put at the service of mankind****"* (Statement of the Paris summit 1972, bold by K.Tamm).

This issue was again raised in the WCED report in 1987 calling for a new charter that would consolidate and extend legal principles, creating *"new norms … needed to maintain livelihoods and life on our shared planet"* and *"to guide state behaviour in the transition to sustainable development."* The Earth Charter adopted in 2000 is the result of decades of efforts by hundreds of groups and thousands of individuals to create a document with such norms. A wide-scale investigation of local and national cultures was conducted to identify the common beliefs and values that underlie a global ethic for living sustainably. However, I found no references to the Earth Charter in the hundreds of pages of SD strategies and reports analysed for this study. This indicates that the attention on

intangible values had disappeared from the GOV rhetoric by the early 2000nds. This has caused surprise on behalf of some researchers:

> "*It should be obvious that culture matters to sustainable development. Yet almost 30 years after the Brundtland report "Our Common Future" the incorporation of culture into sustainability debates seems to remain a great challenge, both scientifically and politically"* (Dessein et al 2015: 8).

Why have the once looked-for ethical and normative cultural aspects guiding the path to SD transition been discarded from development discussions in Europe?

The reasons for leaving the Charter aside seem to be of ideological nature. In this sense, the distinction between liberalist and ecologist/feminist ideologies (Heywood 2012, Merchant 1995) can be helpful in understanding the GOV and CS approaches. The Charter seeks to outline an integrated vision for human rights, stressing interdependence and universal responsibility for building a global partnership for SD that recognises the interconnected nature of environmental, economic, social and cultural problems. This is in line with ecologist and feminist stances (Heywood 2012, Merchant 1995) that assign intrinsic value to nature as an interconnected organism or system. The four guiding principles of the Earth Charter have much in common with the CS approach: caring for the community of life with understanding, compassion and love; respecting Earth and life in all its diversity; building democratic societies that are just, sustainable, participatory and peaceful; and securing Earth´s bounty and beauty for present and future generations (The Earth Charter Initiative 2013). As such, the Charter represents the holistic and interconnected approach to development, which is not in line with the liberalist ideology (Heywood 2012) spread on the GOV level, focused on competition and considering environment a reservoir of resources with no or limited independent intrinsic value. This can help to explain why the Charter has had limited political influence despite its broad-based and participatory development, and why many stakeholders were unaware of its existence.

Another example of the inner-outer distinction between the levels becomes apparent in approaches to knowledge, education and awareness raising. Education always communicates certain values, principles and practices, serving a certain ideology, which explains the relevance of being explicit about it. As many other social processes, it also lies somewhere between the tangible-intangible dichotomy: learning is an intangible processes taking place invisibly in the inner world of a person, but it is expressed in social situations, words and written texts.

The mainstream SD approach, including the GOV approach, is mostly concerned with knowledge about the outer world. Quantifiable measures are mostly used to evaluate progress. On that level there is low interest in experiential, experimental and indigenous or traditional ways of knowing, as these are not considered relevant to foster the current development goals aiming at efficiency, growth and innovation.

The CS approach also stresses the significance of inner research and education. The intangible and qualitative aspects include the invisible phenomena and inner processes such as awareness, knowledge, values and thoughts, judgements and prejudices, ideas and worldviews, which play a significant role in fostering or hemming SD progress. The stance that alternative (and intuitive) knowledge needs to be given more credit and credibility and its underestimation should cease has been expressed not only by the CS level, but also several researchers from different disciplines. In some disciplines, much value is placed on this type of knowledge, for instance in anthropology, ethnology and folkloristics. The folklorist Marilyn Motz has argued that intuitive knowledge is one legitimate way of knowing, very common to human societies and indeed intrinsic to it; and the fact that it cannot be evaluated with the measuring sticks of modern science does not undermine it (1998: 340). The biologist Brian Goodwin has similarly argued for the need to allow more respect and space for qualitative, intuitive and subjective knowledge, as this contextual knowledge is often side-lined in the

positivist-minded perspective and not considered a relevant source of innovation (Brochman 1997). Qualitative SD aspects are not easy to measure, which is among the main reasons they are often discarded or included only in a limited capacity in the governance approaches. Quantitative aspects are much easier to measure and seemingly offer more clarity and fewer opportunities for conflicts and misunderstandings in interpreting the data. This was also the experience of several governance cases in the sample: once they adopted the economised quantifiable approach to communicate their opinions and arguments on SD-issues, their rapport and cooperation with colleagues improved significantly. The problem is that on the GOV level the intangible and qualitative SD aspects are already implicitly included, but often unreflexively; by formally excluding such aspects, there is next to no openness for second guessing these issues.

Awareness is an important intangible concept present in both approaches. Awareness has been considered an important accelerator for change towards sustainability, referred to as "change from the inside out" (O'Brien 2013). How to increase sustainability awareness and knowledgeability? Sustainability education (both formal and informal), communication (via formal media channels as well as social media) and artistic practices belong to the key tools for information exchange and societal dialogue facilitating transformation on the communal as well as national and international levels. The relevance of these issues has also been suggested by other researchers (e.g. Hristova et al 2015, Dessein et al 2015). One aspect where CS efforts have been much more present is the field of artistic practices and works. This medium has the power to facilitate disenchantment from habitual practices and truths, generate social dialogue and raise public awareness on sustainability issues, serving as potential catalysts for change.

**Human-nature relationship.** Another central aspect intimately connected to culture is the human-nature relationship. Based on the discussion so far, I suggest that many differences between the approaches boil down to two aspects:

- Value of nature: intrinsic or dependent on human needs?
- Human identity/role: participants in nature or controllers and managers of environment?

The first issue was also discussed in more detail in 5.1.1. in relation to the strong or weak sustainability and sufficiency-efficiency dichotomies. From the CS perspective, nature has an intrinsic value, which is in line with the strong sustainability and deep ecology stances and represents the sufficiency approach. This approach is in line with Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold and Arne Naess's perspectives discussed in Chapter 3. Although we cannot speak of direct influence of Thoreau or Leopold, in many CS cases the deep-shallow ecology distinction developed by Naess and later popularised by Joanna Macy (Macy et al. 2012b) was well-known. As seen in Figure 13, this approach to nature can be visualised as an adjusted version of the nested dependency model, representing the holistic interconnected strong sustainability approach. Here the cultural dimension relevant for the civil society perspective is added to the classical trio of ecology, society and economy. This model depicts the overall embeddedness of economy and society in culture and nature. The weakness of this model is that it downplays the


**Figure 13. Adjusted nested dependency model of strong sustainability.**

multifarious influences the embedded parts can have on each other; however, it clearly conveys the sense of dependency on nature and culture.

From the GOV perspective, the value of nature depends on human needs. Seeing nature as a resource for human wellbeing allows making adjustments by greening the practices and making them more resource efficient, all the while continuing on the utilitarian course. This view is in line with weak sustainability and shallow ecology stances characterising the reductionist approach to SD. It is relevant to note that this division is not absolute. There are exceptions – for example in the Estonian NSDS the human-nature relationship is also described in line with the nested model. However, the economising turn of the overall GOV approach can be visualised as the Mickey Mouse model of weak sustainability (SANZ 2009, Tamm 2013b). This derivation of the three overlapping dimensions model visualises the dominance of the economic aspect over the social and environmental aspects, accurately depicting the results of the economising turn. As the weak sustainability model suggests, the environment is less relevant, because substituting natural resources is possible through human inventions of manmade capital. The weakness of this model is that it does not show overlapping areas; however, it is useful by communicating the core tendency to disconnect development areas exhibited by the GOV approach as well as economic dominance.

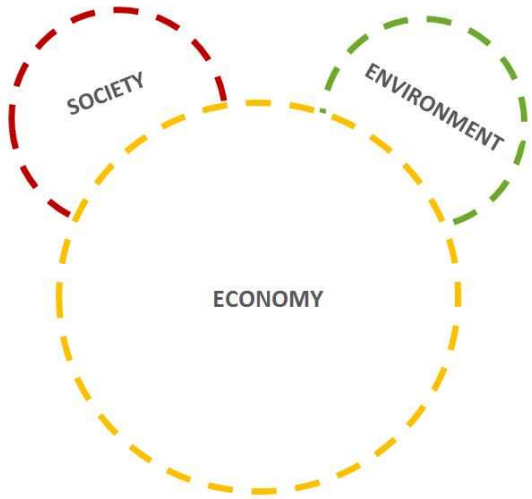



**Figure 14. The Mickey Mouse model of weak sustainability.**

In terms of human role and identity, the GOV level tends to see humans as controllers and managers of the environment. In contrast, the CS considers humans as cohabitants and participants of nature that should stop acting as the owners of the world and show much more respect for nature. The interconnectedness with nature and more specifically, the relevance of personally experiencing the reconnection and acting while aware of it are emphasised as means for moving towards SD. To achieve the change in mindsets for becoming a participant, the CS approach suggests downscaling and reconnecting, but also adopting a new narrative of the role of human being. As a forerunner of this line of thinking, Aldo Leopold once wrote: *"A land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such"* (Leopold 1992: 151). Even without any knowledge of Thoreau's, Leopold's, Naess's or Macy's work by research participants, a significant overlap with the CS approach was observed. The message of regaining respect for nature and reconnecting with it to live within natural limits is also shared by many indigenous groups and nations worldwide. Through Joanna Macy from the deep ecology movement and Bill Mollison and David Holmgren from the permaculture movement, the narrative of regaining respect for nature and understanding humans as members of the greater community of life has informed the approaches of all networks in the sample to some extent. Several ecovillages and transition initiatives in the sample were practicing deep ecology methods and most were also familiar with or actively using permaculture knowledge focusing on learning from nature and cooperating with it[31].

[31] Permaculture and deep ecology practices were widely used in German and Portuguese TN and GEN cases.

The observation of Kaplinski (2003) relating to different attitudes accompanying the use of concepts "nature" and "environment" applied: the GOV representatives had a more anthropocentric perspective and preferred to use "environment" and the CS representatives seeked a more bio-centric perspective and rather used "nature".

Ecofeminism has also brought in the gender issue, arguing that the current sustainability crises are caused by the unbalanced female-male dynamic, more specifically by the dominance of the "male" mechanistic approach to nature (Schoch 2002). Whereas the "female" view sees nature as a kind and fertile living organism deserving respect, the "male" approach to nature is functional, seeing it as a system to be fought with or a mechanism that can be used, adjusted and fixed as needed. As in the sample only two cases out of sixteen tackled the impact of gender relationships to SD-processes[32], it did not warrant inclusion among the core issues, but deserves to be mentioned as a thematic thread.

The CS and GOV approaches described above could also be described as anthropocentristic and biocentristic. The CS approach attempts to transcend anthropocentrism and move towards biocentrism, or life-centredness to find a way how humanity can thrive without jeopardising other forms of life. Whether it is possible to transcend anthropocentrism, is a whole separate question, and shall not be tackled here.

The GOV approach is focused on considering human needs and interests, development potential and responsibilities. As such, this view pays limited attention to the interconnectedness of the natural processes beyond immediate human interest. In the spirit of neoliberalism, it is believed that green growth, increased efficiency and innovation are sufficient to ensure equity and sustainable development. The obvious problem is that economic growth has not helped to eradicate intragenerational inequity, so there is not much reason to hope that it is able to eradicate intergenerational equity. This issue is returned to in the next section.

Continuing the discussion on holistic and reductionist perspectives, also the self-organised-controlled dichotomy deserves attention here (see also Sahtouris 2009). While considering the evolutionary processes random, the GOV representatives make efforts to remain in control of the situation (at least in rhetoric). For the CS level, participation and trust are more relevant than being in control. From the other hand, the civil society approach aims to take responsibility, and this means that they do want to take control. However, although they would also like to impact the big-scale outer processes such as climate change, they propose to start with themselves and their local surroundings and communities, which can gradually and collectively add up to global solutions. In summary, the civil society perspective seeks to mend the modern split between people and the rest of nature by placing human existence within a holistic cosmology and granting humans a special place as conscious participants and guardians of nature. The meaningful and interconnected worldview is considered empowering as it encourages taking responsibility and action. The climate change issues have grown significantly in importance in the past decade and provide a good example of how different the vantage points of reductionist and holistic perspectives are. Whereas the GOV approach suggests making structural, political and legal changes to deal with climate change, the CS suggests inner climate change as the first step that needs to take place for finding the outer solution (Jackson 2009).

The meaningfulness-randomness dichotomy within the holistic-reductionist dichotomy also involves the dimension of spirituality and sacredness. The indigenous and deep ecology approaches as well as some initiatives in the sample added a spiritual dimension to ecology, reaching beyond respect.

[32] In Tamera and Sieben Linden the need to heal the fertile Mother Earth from plundering "male" greediness was expressed. In Tamera the dysfunctional female-male relationship was considered the root cause of the whole crises hindering peaceful development and causing societal violence and destruction.

In evolution theory, the strongest proponents of the meaningfulness theory are creationists who consider it impossible that the intelligent and complex world has developed without an intelligent creator. Regardless of belief or disbelief in the existence of God it was perceived as the further side of the spectrum that starts with recreating respect for nature and ends with reverence for its sacredness. Similarly to the case of gender distinction in human-nature relationships, only a couple of cases emphasised it, so it is not among the core issues either, but deserves to be mentioned here.

**The GOV approach tends towards not explicitly including culture, but can culture be excluded?** One of the central arguments for not including cultural aspects explicitly into the governance discussions on SD is the wish to protect freedom of choice in the context of democracy. The private sphere should not be regulated, and as long as people do not harm others, they should have the right to do as they choose. However, the argument that the cultural aspects should be excluded in order to protect the freedom of choice must be analysed more precisely, because they are anyway included.

In the face of continuing and even deepening ecological destruction and social suffering it seems unreasonable to protect the freedom to continue in a system that is not doing a good job in ensuring long-term sustainability. In the current system economy has a hegemonic status. Another central argument justifying omitting cultural aspects is that it would be too difficult and time-consuming to reach agreements on cultural issues and goals of SD. This is why the SD progress is mainly measured in quantitative terms that claim to be neutral. Even human well-being, the primary goal of SD, is often still measured with economic yardsticks. The holistic-reductionist dichotomy is helpful when trying to understand the choice of criteria for including or excluding aspects from SD discussions. The GOV approach has chosen a more externally and quantitatively oriented reductionist approach, focusing primarily on those aspects of other development dimensions that suit the economizing agenda. Inclusion of inner and qualitative cultural aspects requires a more systematic and holistic approach which fits the CS agenda combining qualitative and quantitative dimensions. Indeed, from the holistic perspective they are simply interconnected parts of the whole. As the permaculturist Bill Mollison described the effect of holistic perspective: "*One of the most compelling aspects of holism is the deliquescence of the dichotomy between internal values and external action, revealed in a deep acceptance of personal responsibility for creating viable social and ecological structures*" (Mollison 1990: 1).

I argue that culture as a human meaning-making and orientation system informing and shaping our choices and actions cannot be excluded – it can be simply included either explicitly or implicitly. The ideas and values keeping the growth-oriented development model running are also cultural in nature. Thus, by leaving the intangible value-related aspects out of political discussions and decision-making, the existing underlying value orientations and practices are preserved and perpetuated. The reluctance to include qualitative and worldview-related considerations and criteria serves the interest of protecting the ruling system and its accepted value-orientations from being questioned and changed. The more open approach of the CS level is more open to reconsidering its approach and seeking alternatives which seems more reasonable in the changing circumstances.

## 5.1.5. Reconsidering sustainability, sustainable development and culture

Definitions are always constructed and contested, but there is no way around them. Below, the use of the concepts "sustainability", "sustainable development" and "culture" is revised in the light of this research before proceeding with the GT articulation.

Let's start with the "sustainability" and "sustainable development" concepts. The initial plan was to

distinguish between these concepts in this book. However, when looking at the field and analysing the data it became evident that research participants used these concepts as synonyms. This also applied to many researchers (e.g. Dessein et al 2015). In fact, sustainability was often used as the abbreviation of sustainable development. I still see the benefit of differentiating between these concepts (see 3.2. for definitions and development), but as this distinction does not have a central relevance for this study, the initial plan was abandoned.

Research revealed that the exact meaning of these concepts in specific situations, texts or contexts was mostly not explicated. Actors on both levels took nearly no time to consider what these concepts signify, and rather assumed that there is a common ground. This confirms the suspition that the apparent consensus on SD issues is largely illusory, because the case study results and theoretical discussion show the underlying diversity of views on what SD means, how it could be reached and where it should lead us.

The broad rhetorical consensus on SD issues rests largely on the open and vague nature of these concepts, which has both positive and negative sides. Some, like Frederick Buttel or Peter Goggin, advocate their demise as useless, empty concepts (Buttel 2000: 61-62), or criticise them as empty and contested as they have been used for "*just about any form of development marketing, becoming a catchall for justifying business as usual*" (Goggin 2009: 7), while others, like Mark Roseland, protect the ambiguity for lending flexibility and allowing for more freedom for adapting them to different settings (Roseland 1998: 22). Despite vagueness and criticism, the concepts have enjoyed noteworthy popularity across interest groups over the past decades, acting as a connecting link and cooperation catalyst. The processes running under the SD agenda have sparked an unprecedented amount of debate and cooperation between previously confrontational interest groups and actors around development goals (Endl et al. 2012: 5). In the context of this study it is clear that these concepts have helped to foster cross-sectoral dialogue and joint efforts, which is why I would rather agree with Roseland here.

As discussed in detail in chapter 3.2., the concept of sustainability began to be used in connection with the sparing use of resources in the early 18$^{th}$ century (Sebaldt 2002: 24) and has maintained a strong connection to resource use. The etymological sources indicate that in its current meaning the concept started to be used since 1972, popularised by the 1972 Club of Rome report "Limits to Growth", referring to a model of the future which is resilient to sudden and uncontrollable collapse and capable of satisfying the basic material requirements of all people (Meadows et al 1972: 158). Grober summarises it by stating: *"In sum, "sustainable" in various languages means, and has always meant, structures which can hold up, which can bear a load. That is the essential constant in the structure of this term"* (Grober 2015: 7). It remains open if it refers to a growth or degrowth oriented system. The SD concept, on the other hand, is an intentionally developed concept stating that balanced development of social, ecological and economic aspects is needed for development to be sustainable. Economic growth was considered a part of that model from the outset. As the analysis in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 vividly shows, the meaning of this concept has undergone a continuous change in Europe.

However, regardless of the vagueness of the concepts and their use as synonyms, there were also indications that the choice of concept still makes a difference. Two interesting linguistic differences could be observed. Firstly, the CS groups tended to speak more about sustainability, while the GOV actors preferred to use the sustainable development concept, regardless of which concept I used in my question. This observation is corroborated by other researchers, suggesting that this is due to what I would call ideological issues: sustainability alone does not necessarily presuppose further development and economic growth. Joost Dessein and his colleagues have argued that many governments and global corporations pull back from sustainability as it seems threatening:

"*to those sectoral interests for whom "growth" (usually defined as economic growth) is the only way ahead. This would suggest that "sustainability" is a term with a more reaching set of objectives and values, one that can support de-growth and no growth agendas as well as growth, one that might have social equity and justice not economic prosperity as its goal*" (Dessein et al 2015: 22-23).

The economist John Robinson has argued along similar lines that the concept of SD is less radical and thus more attractive for more conservative groups like governments and big organisations for whom development is still a synonym to economic growth, which might at times contradict the essence of sustainability (Robinson 2004: 370). These considerations fit very well with the findings of this research, where the SD level aims at no-growth or degrowth, whereas for the governance level, long-lasting economic growth is considered the key element for ensuring a better life.

The second linguistic change, reflecting the economising turn, is that after the end of the European SD decade, "sustainable growth" has substituted "sustainable development" in the EU2020 strategies and policies. It makes a significant difference: maintaining a balanced ecological, social and economic development versus maintaining economic growth.

Considering all this, it is relevant to outline a working definition of SD developed in the course of this research and used when formulating the GT. Sustainable development is understood as an integrated concept considering the long-term interests of the present and future generations by arguing for a balanced development of the ecological, social, cultural and economic development dimensions within the natural limits to growth. I find the hope of coming up with new materials as substitutes for natural resources for the new generations to be too vague and instrumental, so this definition is rather inclined towards strong sustainability. The working definition is similar to how one transitioner described sustainability:

*"Basically sustainability is imitating how the world works. Which means that you have to know the system, understand it and then work within that system. And whatever you build, you intelligently link it with that system so that it becomes integrated as part of the system. We are kind of a subsystem of nature. What we are doing at the moment is just the other way around, subjecting nature as a subsystem to our anthropocentric system. Of course that does not work, because what we are building is not at all based on fundamental laws of physics or ecology. And that is why we run into problems"* (AF, male, 50s).

This also means that the working definition inclines towards the holistic approach because the reductionist approach does not consider the systematic interconnectedness of processes, objects and living beings, leaving too many relevant aspects out of consideration.

**Anthropocentrism and biocentrism**. Here the anthropocentric or biocentric nature of SD deserves revisiting. The Brundtland definition as the foundation stone of the SD concept was anthropocentric, focusing on the interests of the present and future human generations. Whereas the GOV level is satisfied with this perspective, the CS level generally tries to take a broader, more holistic or biocentric approach that would go beyond human needs (see 5.1.3. for the relative nature of needs).

However, it seems that in the economising turn, the dominating GOV approach to development has lost sight of humans as the measure of things. Trying to rely on quantitative measures leaves an impression of trying to rely on more reliable criteria than human values. The aims of economic growth, competitiveness and efficiency have grown into imperatives for any positive improvements, sidelining qualitative considerations in the process. Even though unequality continues to be a pressing problem and the current global production and consumption chains continue to uphold it, under the neoliberal dogma that claims that everybody profits when businesses make profit and

grow, there is no alternative to globalising economic growth. The greening of growth has happened on a too marginal scale to speak of a significant change. It has also been argued by other researchers that the current economised development model is failing to secure SD for the present world population and seriously undermines the prospects of future generations (Bernheim 2006: 79), failing to be anthropocentric in the broader sense and serving primarily the wealthiest segment of humanity.

At the centre of such an approach is not human wellbeing with its contextual variations, but an abstract system of quantitative measures as criteria of human wellbeing. However, for the majority of people their values along with accompanying emotions are the central motivators and carriers of meaning (Dessein et al. 2015: 44). When measuring development becomes too abstract and ignores or contradicts their values, it can generate frustration, resignation or lack of trust. In this light I suggest that the governance SD approach can be considered econocentric, which is a subdivision of anthropocentrism.

Whereas the civil society perspective strives towards biocentrism, it focuses on the well-being of the present and future human generations and considers humans not only as consumers, but qualitative beings with more diverse horizons of action. It is quite likely that it is humanly impossible to fully transcend anthropocentrism, but there is still a lot to be done to improve the way the needs and interests of other subjects and objects in the life-supporting system are considered and involved in planning SD.

Consequently, both the CS and the GOV approaches are subdivisions of anthropocentrism, whereas one has an abstract economic focus, and the other a likewise abstract claim of biocentredness.

**Culture and sustainable development**

As discussed in 3.2.3., culture was rarely considered in relation to SD until the turn of the century. If included, it was considered a part of social sustainability. This meant not differentiating between issues like poverty, education, healthcare or housing from questions centered on identity, knowledge, material and immaterial traditions, practices and heritage, and maintenance of commonly accepted belief systems. In the recent decade, it has been argued that three dimensions are not enough to reflect the interrelated complexity of contemporary societies:

> *"Today, the world is not exclusively facing challenges of an economic, social or environmental nature. Creativity, knowledge, diversity and beauty are essential premises for dialogue for peace and progress, as they are intrinsically related to human development and freedom"* (UCLG 2010).

Even up to 2015, the prevailing research still tackled the conventional sustainability discourses rooted in environmental and economic perspectives (Dessein et al 2015: 8). Interestingly, academic interest in the interplay of culture and sustainable development seems to have risen in the period coinciding with this research. For example, the sustainability researcher Oliver Parodi argued in 2015 that the neglected cultural references in the SD-discourse include inter- and transcultural aspects, lack of interrelations between individual and collective, and lack of attention to aesthetics in sustainability (2015). This study tackles mainly the first two aspects of those often neglected issues.

**How is culture understood in this study?** As explained in subchapter 5.1.3., culture is not understood in this study in the narrow sense of high culture, indigenous culture or even aqua- and agriculture, as it often occurs in the mainstream sustainability debate, but in a broader sense as a framework that informs the way humans understand themselves and the world around them, guiding the way they interpret what is good or bad, true and false, relevant or irrelevant and shape the world around them. This is in line with how Clifford Geertz famously defined culture: "*…man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the*

*analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning"* (1973: 5).

This interpretation of culture brings in a very relevant human quality – the ability to imagine, create new mental or abstract spaces beyond the material dimensions. As discussed later, this ability increases human freedom, but can also cause problems, e.g. because growth can be infinite on the abstract level, but on the material level there are limits and dire consequences for ignoring them.

In one of the most thorough studies of the relations of culture and sustainable development so far, Joost Dessein, Katariina Soini, Graham Faircloug and Lummina Horlings suggested three ways culture contributes to sustainable development (Dessein et al 2015: 28-29):

1) Culture in sustainable development: culture is seen as a dimension or pillar of SD next to ecological, economic and social considerations. This definition focuses on the creative sector.

2) Culture for sustainable development: culture is seen as a mediator, connecting and balancing economic, scological and social sustainability. Here culture is a more influential factor impacting the framing of SD.

3) Culture as sustainable development: here culture has a transformative role as the essential foundation for achieving the aims of SD. Here culture and sustainability become mutually intertwined, and the distinction between the economic, social, and environmental dimensions begin to fade.

None of the groups in the sample limited their understanding of culture to high culture and this study does not focus on this aspect either. The main focus is on the second way of interpreting culture as a mediator between different dimensions, impacting the framing of what sustainable development is. For example, when including culture as an aspect of SD, the GOV representatives mainly understood it as a way of doing things (e.g. the need to change governance culture or develop participation culture). This is a relevant perspective, but it allows leaving aside ideological reflections and discussions, which would be relevant when choosing the development direction. The CS representatives understood culture often in a broader way as the foundation for SD, which is why they considered the need for a new culture, a new narrative or a paradigm change towards a positive vision so relevant for achieving systems change.

Joost Dessein and his colleagues have suggested that recognizing culture as the root of all human decisions and actions, and as an overarching concern in sustainable development thinking enables culture and sustainability to become mutually intertwined (Dessein et al 2015: 8). For the purposes of this study, I would like to rephrase this statement and take it one step further: culture and sustainability (or unsustainability) are intrinsically intertwined, but openly recognizing culture as the root of all human decisions and actions, and as an overarching concern in sustainable development thinking would enable to explicate culture's role and legitimise its inclusion to discussions, planning and implementing processes.

As discussed below, culture in this broader sense cannot be excluded from development considerations and practices – it can just be included implicitly or explicitly. Research has shown that explicating cultural aspects can facilitate cross-sectoral mutual understanding and foster the cooperation relevant for making substantial changes (Tamm 2013b).

# 5.2. Grounded theory of the SD scene in Europe

The research so far proves Ulrich Grober right when indicating that sustainability – as well as sustainable development – can be described as children of crisis (Grober 2002). The task of reconciling our Western growth-oriented civilization with its physical, ecological and socio-cultural support systems is not simple. On the governance and research level this task has been called the Great Transformation (Schellnhuber et al 2010), on the civil society level the Great Turning (Macy 2012, Korten 2007). In the following passages different strategies for mastering this great challenge are explored further and the relationships between the civil society and governance approaches to sustainable development in Europe are connected with the international metanarratives of change.

The unpredictability and uncontrollability of the modern world have made it a "runaway world" (Giddens 2000). Narratives as deeply rooted ways of human world-making are helpful for making sense of the sustainability scene aiding in distinguishing between good and bad, relevant and irrelevant, useful and dangerous, and creating safety and identity in this runaway world. The theoretical discussion in previous sections demonstrated how close the civil society and governance approaches are in terms of understanding the problems and suggesting solutions to a number of existing development approaches. Furthermore, analysis shows that the local European macronarratives on sustainable development effortlessly merged with international metanarratives of change. The civil society ways of understanding the causes and solutions to the crises as well as human role and relationship to the world merged with the strong sustainability oriented holistic metanarrative, whereas the governance approach merged with the weak sustainability oriented reductionist metanarrative of change.

This section has two parts: first of all articulating two metanarratives of change as they have been expressed in the European context on the civil society and governance levels and secondly offering a grounded analysis of the sustainable development scene in Europe. As the civil society and governance narratives merged into the holistic and reductionist metanarratives of change, the observations made about the European situation in this subchapter can perhaps be helpful when exploring further samples in Europe or democratic and capitalist settings beyond Europe relying on the reductionist or holistic metanarratives of change.

## 5.2.1. Metanarratives of change

Which are the saturated core themes and categories that build up the backbone of the emerging theory of sustainable development scene in Europe? The local European macronarratives that resulted from systematically and iteratively analysed data in the case study analysis were analysed further, contextualising the results in theoretical discussion with extant literature to reach theoretical saturation. This enabled to unfold the initial core themes "reconnecting" and "economizing turn" to develop a more thorough conceptual description of the situation. It also made clear that in this case the core themes and categories will appear as dichotomies – not because of looking for opposites, but because these accurately conceptually describe respective approaches to SD, accounting for most of the variation in pattern and behaviour. The CS core theme "reconnecting" became paired with the "disconnecting" concept of the GOV approach because these concepts represent central actions engaging actors in a series of activities aimed at achieving more sustainable ways of life. The economizing turn has meant disintegrating the integrated SD approach that was aiming at balanced development of all SD dimensions by prioritizing economic concerns. The CS aspiration is to counteract this disintegration by turning towards a more holistic approach and fostering a reintegrating turn to reach sustainable development.

As the aspiration towards either reintegrating or economising turn is a more precise and all-encompassing conceptual description of the core interests of the CS and GOV cases respectively, these are considered the core themes with the prime function of integrating the theory. The reconnecting-disconnecting dichotomy counts among the core categories next to the upscaling-downscaling dichotomy addressing the direction of change, and holistic-reductionist dichotomy that describes the type of change that is considered necessary for achieving SD. These themes and categories are helpful for grasping the nature of the desired change and account for most of the variation in pattern and behaviour, capturing the essential processes that engage actors, individuals as well as groups and institutions in a series of activities aimed at achieving a better, more sustainable development.

The resulting saturated core themes and categories enable articulating metanarratives of change representing specific overarching approaches to development with particular ways of thinking and behavioural strategies for achieving their goals. Upon theoretical discussion the GOV approach merged effortlessly with the reductionist upscaling metanarrative characterised by the weak sustainability stance and the CS approach merged into the holistic downscaling metanarrative characterised by the strong sustainability stance. Table 37 sums up the saturated core themes and categories along with their main properties.

**Table 37. Overview of the saturated core themes and categories.**

| Reintegrating turn | Economizing turn |
|---|---|
| **Downscaling**<br>Sufficiency<br>No growth/degrowth | **Upscaling**<br>Efficiency<br>Green growth |
| **Reconnecting / re-embedding**<br>Relocalising | **Disconnecting / disembedding**<br>Globalising |
| **Holistic perspective**<br>Explicit inclusion of culture | **Reductionist perspective**<br>Implicit inclusion of culture |
| **Strong sustainability** | **Weak sustainability** |

It is relevant to mention that although these different development paths are often described with oppositional concepts, they are not mutually exclusive and in different settings and roles one person can also represent different metanarratives (see e.g. the example of the EU official in 4.2.4.).

### 5.2.1.1. Reintegrating turn: the CS approach to achieving SD in Europe

To achieve a turn towards sustainable development, changing the dominating disintegrated approach to development and especially the excessive focus on quantitative economic growth is considered necessary. The current story of human development is experienced as an overwhelming and disempowering story of violence and waste(fulness) lacking positive perspectives and alternatives. This is why the case study networks and initiatives have been working on developing new positive alternatives and visions that would not connect sustainability with the crises and fear. According to this perspective, change starts on the individual and cultural levels by raising awareness, changing the mindsets and developing a positive vision of the future.

This new vision or paradigm or culture (different groups use a different concept) tells a meaningful and causal story of human development, emphasizing the relevance of respecting nature as a self-organising and -regulating system that humanity is a part of. Nature is seen in the spirit of strong sustainability as something that has intrinsic value. Humans are seen as participants in nature that do not have full knowledge or control over natural processes and should seek to live in a way that does not limit the opportunities of other forms of life to live according to their nature. The extensive

polluting and wastefulness that has led to climate change and loss of biodiversity is considered the effect of trying to interfere with the natural systems, exceeding the limits to growth instead of living within its limits. It is believed that the reintegration turn would also help to solve the climate change problematic with its focus on downscaling, relocalising, sufficiency and strong sustainability.

Cultural and qualitative aspects are explicitly included in development considerations. There is openness for learning and respect for different ways of knowing, including experimental, experiential and intuitive knowledge. The worldview shared by carriers of this metanarrative is holistic, which also explains why people are optimistic about making small-scale changes – from the holistic perspective also small-scale actions make a difference, especially as there are networks of initiatives that support doing these actions.

Reconnecting and relocalising are among the key activities for translating the positive vision to reality. Reconnecting involves restoring connection with oneself, with other people, with the place of living or working, with things that we daily use, as well as with knowledge of our ancestors. Reconnecting to nature and relearning to cooperate with it instead of using it as dead matter is considered relevant for moving towards more balanced development. This approach involves respect for the surrounding world that in some cases can grow to considering something sacred – for example the web of interconnected life that we are a part of. Reconnecting also involves reviving community with other people and learning to live in a community again. This involves acquiring cooperation and communication skills and valuing diversity that gives social resilience. Reviving community requires also adopting a proactive and collaborative spirit, learning to trust others and the collective intelligence to again experience its empowering effect.

Systems change is not considered optional, but unavoidable, as the current systems are experienced as too wasteful and energy-intensive. The main direction of the desired systems change is downscaling. The people representing this narrative stress the relevance of changing the wasteful systems by taking the lead for adopting a simpler, more responsible way of life. For minimising both waste and wastefulness, relocalising and adopting a sufficiency-oriented way of life is considered necessary. Downscaling is believed to facilitate taking responsibility and restoring autonomy from the non-resilient big systems. Instead of economic growth, no growth or degrowth is talked about and qualitative growth is strived towards. The downscaling model relies on local, often small businesses, where transparency about the life cycle of products, working conditions etc. is much greater than in the current global systems. People, who make business as a way of taking responsibility, follow sufficiency principles out of conviction, which means that they are more likely to stick with their chosen development direction on the long run, regardless of outer pressure.

This holistic approach is based on an understanding of the interconnectedness of life, so the aim is creating a more localised, self-sufficient and sustainable future for everyone, including animals and plants. This approach is in line with the nested dependency model representing strong sustainability stance (see 5.1.4.). The cultural dimension is added to the classical trio of nature, society and economy and the overall dependence of economy and society from culture and of all these aspects from nature is emphasized. By questioning the supremacy of human progress, defending the intrinsic value of nature and the relevance of being connected to it and cooperating with it, the CS approach to achieving SD is close to deep ecology and permaculture perspectives, and in line with the views of Thoreau and Leopold.

#### 5.2.1.2. Economizing turn: the GOV approach to achieving SD in Europe

Driven by economised SD perception, the governance approach aims to create an upscaled, globalised, competitive, greened and efficient way of life. The GOV level stresses the relevance of achieving

green growth by raising competitiveness and resource efficiency and creating green jobs that respect ecological balance. This SD approach can be described as reductionist due to a strong focus on furthering economic development and an omission of intangible and qualitative aspects. An internationalisation of development efforts is considered necessary, which inevitably leads to some degree of disconnecting or disembedding.

Clear hierarchies and specialised expert knowledge are valued. There is trust that with some adjustments – e.g. greening energy and resource use – the existing systems can cope with the crises. It is believed that this approach fostering green growth, sustainable consumption and production, investments in education and innovation and job creation to eradicate poverty creates a better future for the entire society.

To ensure climate protection and mitigate global warming, energy efficiency, sustainable transport, consumption and production are considered necessary. The attitude towards the environment is utilitarian, and the vague responsibility for SD, the quantitative approach and limited ownership characterise weak sustainability. The responsibility for making the changes happen is somewhat unclear and a general dependence on the UN can be observed. As discussed in subchapter 3.4, already in the 1970s the more substantial actions in Europe to address the spreading environmental concern due to excessive attention to economic development were largely triggered by the UN. The UN has remained a relevant motivator for the processes ever since.

The upscaling approach relies on big businesses, for which sustainable economics has been suggested as a profitable direction of development. However, as the governance representatives also admitted, the interest of the business sector is unstable: if sustainability aims are profitable, progress is made, but when the situation changes and they cease to be profitable, there is a high probability that businesses will return to business-as-usual. This further underlines the vagueness of responsibility of the upscaling model.

In accordance with weak sustainability the economic aspect dominates over other development aspects. Substituting natural resources with manmade capital is considered acceptable as long as the overall level of capital remains unchanged. Much hope in achieving improvements is placed on technological innovation and the attitude towards nature is often mechanistic. The world and humans in it are seen as a result of coincidental developments, so the environment is something that needs to be controlled and managed like a machine, a Spaceship Earth (Ward 1966, Jasanoff 2004) with human experts as captains and mechanics who can fix it, if and as needed. This kind of approach to development can be described as mechanistic, with a hierarchical structure and top-down command. The raison d´etre of this kind of systems is to produce products or profit serving the owner's self-interest (Sahtouris 2009).

In the spirit of specialization it is considered useful to disconnect different development dimensions from each other to be able to tackle their issues more effectively. The Mickey Mouse model (see 5.1.4.) visualising this segmented SD-approach has characterized the economising turn of the SD narrative since the end of the SDS decade.

Culture along with its qualitative and intangible qualities is considered generally too complex and vague to be included in development discussions. If included, then mostly in service of improving efficiency of processes (e.g. developing a cooperation culture, improving governance culture), a tool for ensuring societal agreement, supporting innovation and research or ensuring the survival of cultural heritage. For example, moving towards open governance is considered relevant to improve social cohesion, ensure equal opportunities and foster the development of a culture of participation.

Theoretical analysis showed that the governance approach merged with the reductionist metanarrative characterized by efficiency-oriented, mechanistic and modernist perspectives. This

metanarrative is shared by people tending to support weak sustainability, shallow ecology and stand for the liberalist ideology.

## 5.2.2. Key hypothesis of the grounded theory on governance and civil society approaches to sustainable development in Europe

The analysis revealed that unsustainable developments of the current way of life were the main concerns for participants from both levels, so the research focused on identifying the ways the research participants understood sustainable development and attempted to achieve it by solving their concerns.

Having identified and conceptually described the two overarching development approaches used by the governance and civil society groups in the sample – "economising turn" representing the reductionist metanarrative of change and the "reintegrating turn" representing the holistic metanarrative of change – offers a good basis for exploring how feasible these two development approaches are for coping with the pressing challenges of our time.

### 5.2.2.1. Dismantiling the seeming consensus on sustainable development

Vagueness of the sustainable development concept has created a seeming consensus on its relevance, reflected in the claim that sustainable development has been mainstreamed in Europe. This seeming consensus overshadows the underlying diversity of the desired development directions, produces misunderstandings hindering cooperation and makes responsibility for the long-term sustainable development progress vague. Research shows that participants from neither level took hardly any time to reflect on what they mean under sustainable development when making plans, strategies, statements or carrying out activities to achieve it. This was mostly because the matter seemed clear enough, so it was presumed that there was a common ground to procede from, or due to lacking time and resources for reflection as things needed to get done. However, when looking closer, the consensus concerns the wish to find ways for living in a better way while reducing inequity and environmental degradation. The perception on what is better, and most of all, better for whom and what should be done to achieve sustainable development can significantly differ. As the case studies explicate, the different underlying development logic of the governance and civil society approaches leads to different development directions that require different, even opposing actions. The core differences of these different development paths are expressed clearly in the saturated core dichotomies: economising or reintegrating, reconnecting or disconnecting, upscaling or downscaling, reductionist or holistic perspective, strong or weak sustainability.

The vague and seeming consensus has led to a number of problems. For example, although it has helped to bring many actors across sectors together to advance the sustainable development agenda since the 1990s, it has also generated many misunderstandings and mutual frustration between the interest groups. Such negative experiences have produced prejudices and blocked further cooperation efforts (see e.g. the Transition Freiburg case in 4.1.2.2.). Vagueness also paved the way to turning away from the more integrative SD agenda. Even during the European sustainable development decade, when interest in achieving sustainable development was at its height, the respective indicators and strategies remained too general, abstract and unbinding, contributing to vague responsibility across sectors, facilitating forsaking the integrated sustainable development agenda for the narrower, but more concrete short-term agenda of raising competitiveness and ensuring

green growth and jobs. The integrative approaches often don't fit together with the existing specialised structures with specialised tasks, causing confusion and facilitating inaction[33].

A further problem caused by vagueness is that it has popularised the superficial and hasty claim that "sustainable development is mainstreamed in Europe". The analysis shows that only a fraction of what was set as sustainable development goals in the European and national sustainable development strategies was achieved before the economising turn changed the development priorities for the new decade. Furthermore, much of what was written down in these documents did not get translated into practice (the Portuguese case is the extreme example here, see 3.4.2.4. and 4.2.3.). The EU 2020 strategy and the respective national versions into which the SD-agenda is claimed to be integrated, focus on finding ways to ensure the sustainability of economic growth, which is a whole different thing. Based on inside info from the experts, this claim originates from the political wish to diplomatically end the situation where the EU simultaneously had two overarching development strategies (see also 3.3.2. and 4.2.4.)[34]. This claim was suggested to officials working with sustainable development issues from above as the standard answer in case there are questions. It was further popularised by people trusting in governance structures, making it a common belief despite being oversimplifying, inaccurate and premature. This claim has also been doubted by Pamela M. Barnes and Thomas C. Hoerber (2013) who question the extent to which sustainability has become embedded in governance structures and call attention to the narrowing of the discourse on sustainability in Europe.

Vague responsibility has also been supported by the short political cycles. To be able to show the results of their actions, politicians tend to focus on short(er) term goals, which means that keeping an eye on the long-term processes has often suffered. To be sure, there are national SD committees in a number of European countries, but their meetings are often sparse and their impact limited. One further example of the vague responsibiliy is the unstable nature of sustainable economics. It was suggested by governance actors that in situations where it was profitable for businesses to invest in sustainability to "do well by doing good", it was done. Significant progress has been made, for example in the area of renewable energy technologies. However, in times of recession when investments to be green do not pay off, companies tend to relapse to the business-as-usual approach. The governance level could be more active to change this situation. As Greenpeace suggested: "*Regulation and pricing mechanisms that could change the calculus, by reducing profitability for destructive practices or banning them altogether, are still broadly missing*" (Greenpeace 2012: 42). However, the governance level has hesitated in order to avoid damaging the competitiveness of the companies.

### 5.2.2.2. Change of narrative: economising the sustainable development agenda

Following a period here called the European decade of sustainable development (the EU SD decade), an economising turn took place across Europe, resulting in a premature shift of the integrated development approach on to the international level and narrowing of the sustainable development agenda on the European level. This research identified three distinctive periods of SD rhetoric and practices in Europe (for more details, see 3.3.2. and especially 5.3.1.2.):

1. the preparation and prioritising phase ranging from the first Rio conference in 1992 to 2000;

[33] This problem is not specific to the governance level. Also in science the transdisciplinary and transformative research often continues to face difficulties as they don't fit into the pre-existing expectations and categories.
[34] There was also pressure from the business sector, as they saw that the SD agenda undermined their aims.

2. the European sustainable development decade ranging from the launch of the EU sustainable development strategy in 2001 to 2009 when the interest in achieving SD goals and writing progress reports was seriously waning;
3. the economising turn starting in 2010 with the decision to not renew or prolong the EU SDS, but to claim having mainstreamed the SD-agenda into the Europe 2020 strategy of growth and jobs running up to 2020.

The governance level has a huge responsibility as the level that has high societal visibility, considerable human and financial resources and legitimate power to advocate change in its chosen direction. When the SD agenda was among top governmental priorities in Europe during the EU SD decade, it helped to raise the profile of related issues and brought sustainability considerations closer to different societal groups, launching various awareness raising and educational programs and supporting the development of green technology and economy. It is beyond doubt that during that period a number of positive changes were made to integrate SD considerations into planning, decision making and legislative processes in the EU and most member states. However, as the case studies show, many SD goals remained on paper and were not met before the economising turn changed development priorities. So when the EU and national governments started prioritising economic development over other development dimensions at around 2010, it impacted whole societies across sectors.

Narrowing of the sustainable development agenda under the economising turn means that only a limited set of issues from the SD agenda that fitted the goals of achieving green growth, create green jobs and ensure continuing competitiveness were included into the new development agenda.

The analysis in chapters 3 and 4 indicates that the situation in Europe was not good enough to justify shifting the integrated SD approach on to the international level and economising the development approach in Europe. As discussed in subchapter 2.3.2.1., it is clear that the situation in the global South is often more urgent and deserving of attention. However, it is relevant to keep in mind that people in the South are connected to the political and practical everyday choices made in the North. Considering that much work was interrupted and many aims were not met, this premature shift in focus in Europe runs the risk of contributing to continuing unsustainable practices perpetuating the worldwide inequality and devastation. Unless the roots of unsustainable practices in the North are more clearly recognized and changed, deeper changes in global production and consumption loops and advancing inter- and intragenerational equity will have limited success. Sustainable development is an ongoing challenge, so it is relevant to tackle the challenges at home and further away parallelly and in an interconnected manner. Gordon Wilson, Pamela Furniss and Richard Kimbowa have argued along similar lines that the first world also has pockets of awful deprivation and continues to develop, so the topics of environment, development and sustainability are as relevant and intertwined in these regions as elsewhere in the world (2009).

The economising turn has disintegrated the SD agenda that attempted to evolve towards balanced development of ecological, social and economic aspects, fortifying the hegemony of economic considerations. The positive effects of this approach include e.g. supporting research on technological progress and innovation to decouple economic growth from resource use and increase energy efficiency to minimise negative environmental impacts, or efforts to raise the level of education and create green jobs to ensure continuing competitiveness of the country or the union. In line with the reductionist metanarrative, the economised development approach believes that technological innovation will help finding substitutes for depleted natural resources. Considering this and the rather shallow structural adjustments undertaken and foreseen by the governance level, it is clear that it

aligns with weak sustainability (see also 5.1.2. and the Mickey Mouse model of weak sustainability in 5.1.4.), corresponding roughly to how the ecological modernisation theory (Mol 1997, Bäckstrand 2004) regards change.

The economised approach is characterised by a firm belief that economic growth is the key to positive developments. Growth has very positive connotations for carriers of the reductionist metanarrative. Greening growth opens a legitimate way to continue on the consumer society course, with the difference that the (over)production and -consumption should become greened. It is believed that there are no alternatives to green economic growth, a view that unnecessarily and implausibly limits our scope of options. Furthermore, research has suggested that after a certain level of wellbeing is reached, economic growth does not bring about more happiness and wellbeing (Hamilton 2004).

The next hypothesis is that the claim of having no alternatives is related to lacking balance in stakeholder inputs. The businesses have institutionalised lobbying groups experienced in packaging and conveying their messages in best possible ways to make them heard and accepted on the governance level – an area where the often fragmented civil society level has much room for improvement. Expert interviews indicated that in the context of the economising turn the quantitative language used by the business lobbyists is more easily understood and accepted on the governance level than the more qualitative language use of the civil society groups (see also 4.2.4. for experiences of the EU sustainability expert on the change of narrative). Furthermore, as the economic concerns are at the forefront of the political agenda and seen as the key to positive changes, it is likely that the opinions of the profit sector have more weight than other inputs, especially as they are professionally expressed and easily usable.

#### 5.2.2.3. Failure to ensure equity and long-term sustainability

Based on the research results the hypothesis can be made that the currently dominating reductionist economised development approach has caused one-sided developments and produced limited progress towards ensuring inter- and intragenerational equity, giving grounds for doubting its suitability to solve the current complex challenges. Greening production and consumption does make a difference, but the changes made under weak sustainability approach have remained limited and slow, lacking the necessary decisiveness and intensity to adequately respond to the crises and mitigate potential risks. Perhaps it is the ease of fulfilling short-term goals in the comfort of our lavish petroculture societies that deprives us of the ability to pay more attention to future risks and long-term goals, making us forget that the effects of climate change can easily cause our petroculture-based world of comfort to fall into pieces.

Ensuring intra- and intergenerational equity in fulfilling the respective needs is one of the most burning issues on the development agenda for both approaches. When looking for causes of continuing inequity, one of the reasons is that the current systems are useful for certain groups of people who are not interested in changing the status quo to keep their positions and benefits. Also, people are frequently not aware of their role as enablers of inequity, for example by making consumption choices. The cheap consumption in the first world continues to entail working conditions for the people producing the goods in the third world that are unacceptable by first world standards. The concern for one's immediate needs seems to override the considerations of long-term needs and community needs, which seem abstract in comparison.

How to measure the rightfulness of our needs? Does it depend on how much we can afford or on ethical considerations? The use of the concept of "needs" seems to indicate that all people in present and future generations have the same basic needs that should be met. However, the meaning of this concept depends on the context (see also 5.1.4. on the relative nature of needs). The standards of

living and accordingly, the perceived needs differ greatly on the individual level within one culture as well as interculturally. The strong and weak sustainability dichotomy is helpful for making sense of different strategies for ensuring that the present and future generations can fulfil their needs. Relying on the liberalist ideology stating that economic growth benefits all participants, the governmental approach suggests that it is acceptable to substitute depleted natural capital with manmade capital. On the other hand, the civil society approach, closer to ecologist ideology, argues for relocalisation and no growth or degrowth as keys to equity. It seems to me that the substitution debate is too instrumental, failing to do justice to the complexity of the systems we live in. Also, the question if the substitution is acceptable should be complemented with the question, if such substitution is realistic and which quality it would have.

In democracy it is generally accepted that as long as meeting one's needs does not harm others or compromise their ability to fulfil their needs, there is freedom of action. The current greened consumerist approach with the vague hope for future inventions to substitute for the depleted resources has not been able to ensure intragenerational equity, not to mention intergenerational equity. The slow and moderate changes have not been sufficient to counteract the continuing inequality, loss of biodiversity, big-scale pollution and depletion of natural resources, which means that future generations will not be able to enjoy similar conditions and will probably have a poorer, environmentally and aesthetically degraded world to live in. Other researchers have also argued that the currently dominating development model is failing to secure sustainable development for the present world population and seriously undermines the prospects of future generations (Bernheim 2006: 79). So, whether democracy and sustainability fit together depends on the way sustainable development is understood. From the weak sustainability perspective they fit together more easily, whereas the strong sustainability approach requires more radical changes in the current systems.

The real-life experiment with weak sustainability approach that the governmental level is conducting with all of us seems to carry too high risks. We only have one planet, so the slow responses to stopping or limiting damage to vulnerable ecosystems and depletion of resources in the vague hope of inventing substitutes for future generations[35] do not seem realistic or responsible. Cultivating weak sustainability means living on the expense of present and future generations without any certainty of being able to invent new resources to ensure equal opportunities. Furthermore, the equality would be equal only in quantitative terms, in qualitative terms the man-made resources differ greatly from natural ones.

A further problem with the dominant economised development approach is that it occasionally tends to protect economic interests against the interest of local people. In the context of this research, two examples of limiting citizen freedom to protect international economic interests emerged. The first example concerns the free trade agreements that the civil society level was often against, because they included points like banning preferring local producers for school food in order to avoid discriminating producers from partner countries. European big businesses and governments were pushing for their adoption to create new big markets and further economic growth and competitiveness. However, in such cases the cheaper price remains the only legitimate criteria, side-lining ecological and social considerations, and undermining local traditions. Another example is the conflict between civil society and corporate interest that arose in 2010 when the EU adopted rules stating that only so-called licensed seeds could be sold in the marketplaces. This regulation created a costly hurdle for small growers, putting their existence in question and risking the loss of many local heirloom varieties, undermining local traditions and diversity.

[35] This attitude is expressed e.g. in the hope of moving to the Mars once life gets too uncomfortable down here.

### 5.2.2.4. Side-lining cultural aspects perpetuates current developments

These examples show how the aim of greening economic growth has grown into an imperative for any positive improvements, side-lining qualitative considerations. Such a Durkheimian functionalist and positivist paradigm, overlooking individuals and concentrating on making structures more effective, has been dominant in the sustainability debate (and research) for a long time. The disconnection illusion has led to the situation where the development seems to be carried by the overriding aim of ensuring economic growth, although time has shown that it fails to bring the expected positive results. At the centre of this approach is not human wellbeing in its contextual variations, but an abstract system of quantitative measures posing as universal criteria for human wellbeing. Relying on quantitative measures means leaving aside too many relational and qualitative factors that make systems function and lend processes relevance and meaning for humans. Furthermore, the current development approach seems to be failing to be anthropocentric in the broader sense of the word by serving primarily the interests of the wealthiest segment of humanity. I suggest that one of the reasons why the governance regulations and suggestions on sustainability issues have received a lukewarm reception is their excessive emphasis on quantifiables, which seems too abstract for many people. The relational and deeply human cultural aspects directly influencing development are either avoided or included only in a minimal manner. The holistic approach common to the civil society level attempts to take a broader, more biocentric approach that would go beyond human needs. Although the reductionist approach can be described as econocentric and the civil society approach as biocentric, both approaches are essentially subdivisions of anthropocentrism (see also 5.1.5.). It is quite likely that it is humanly impossible to fully transcend anthropocentrism, but at the same time there is a lot to do to improve the way the needs and interests of non-human subjects and objects in the life-supporting system are considered. So the situation would benefit from rehumanising and relationalising the development perspective.

**The interplay between culture and sustainable development.** Sustainable development involves complex interrelated systems that cannot be grasped and dealt with sectorally as the specialised government and policy structures tend to do. It is also not possible to achieve sustainable development once and for all – it is an ongoing process and as such needs to be continuously considered in its interconnectedness (Wilson et al. 2009). In this light the current approach of reserving the integrated SD approach for the international level and switching to economised approach in Europe seems unsound. As revisiting the classic limits to growth study shows, continuing on the current development course means that it will be impossible to avoid bigger calamities (Turner and Alexander 2014).

The dominant development direction focusing on managing visible and quantifiable factors tends to neglect many cultural and worldview-related development dimensions up to the extent of dehumanizing sustainable development efforts (as much as it is possible in an anthropocentric system). To complement the overwhelming Durkheimian emphasis on structural and technological macrolevel changes, the current approach needs to be balanced with a more humane, qualitative and systematic perception of development. More attention to relational, qualitative and microlevel approaches to change would help to balance and rehumanise the development course (Tamm 2013b). This requires more openness and acceptance for reconsidering the role culture plays in shaping our lives. So far, culture has been largely excluded from policy-making.

Reasons for excluding value-related aspects from development considerations could not be found from official documents. High-ranking officials explained during expert interviews that one of the main reasons is that open negotiations on cultural issues are considered too difficult and time-consuming. Reaching normative agreements on cultural aspects on national and especially on the EU

level is not considered realistic. Another central argument against considerations to reach agreements regulating cultural beliefs, norms and values is that this would invade democratic rights and freedom of choice. The private sphere should not be regulated, and as long as people do not harm themselves or others, they should have the right to do as they choose. This is a relevant point. However, it oversees the fact that also the currently dominating development approach is based on normative values and beliefs, which are already influencing the freedom of choice and causing serious long-term harm. The harmful results are many on different levels ranging from perpetuating intragenerational inequity and tolerating the continuing destruction of ecosystems and extinction of species to deeply inadequate efforts to deal with climate change issues. Even from the weak sustainability position the agreements underlying the capitalist consumer society are harming and disadvantaging many people from present and future generations as well as other living beings and the life-supporting systems that we all depend on. Perhaps this is overseen because economic values have assumed the position of neutral and natural facts, denying their origin as value-based constructions to reinforce their legitimacy?

It is impossible for humans to act outside of culture as it frames our lives and decisions. Culture as a human meaning-making and orientation system informing and shaping our feelings, thoughts, choices and actions cannot be excluded from development discussions – it can be included either implicitly or explicitly. When underlying value-orientations, norms and practices are not openly discussed, they are taken for granted, preserved and perpetuated. If the stance is taken that there is no room for considering cultural aspects, then it essentially means that the implicitly included normative positions and value orientations are not open for discussion. Considering cultural approaches to sustainability difficult makes it easier to side-line them and continue in the old way without having to make bigger changes in the overarching story and development direction. It also helps to reduce questioning of the ability of the current development direction to foster sustainable development. Thus, it can be argued that under the current economised development approach, economic development has gained priority status in Europe and the reluctance to openly include cultural aspects helps to protect the system from being too intensively questioned and changed.

In the face of the continuing and deepening ecological destruction, social suffering and wastefulness it seems irresponsible that the governance level side-lines worldview-related qualitative issues as too complex, time-consuming, incalculable and, as research showed, too uncomfortable. Furthermore, it seems irrational to protect the current value-orientations and belief systems under the banner of protecting democratic freedom while continuing in a system that fails to admit its serious deficits and seek ways to ensure reliable long-term sustainability. In this light it seems obvious that for reaching significant changes towards more sustainable development, more openness to considering and testing out alternatives is needed. In the context of this study I would argue that the sufficiency approach deserves open deliberation. As the civil society level has more experiences in working with cultural aspects of change (e.g. the inner transition groups of the Transition movement), it could benefit the sustainable development efforts in Europe if the governmental level would be open to their experiences and suggestions. Reconsidering the dominant values, norms and beliefs to make new societal agreements requires openness and willingness. The governmental vision of positive developments is shaped by the efficiency approach, what would make them open up to considering downscaling and no growth strategies? What are the obstacles that hinder mutual understanding and cooperation?

Tracing and analysing different rhetoric and practices of sustainable development in Europe indicated that the core difference between the civil society "reintegrating turn" and governance "economising turn" approaches are cultural. The roots of these complex approaches reach back to the way human identity and connection with nature or environment is interpreted: are we participants in a complex self-regulating system, or managers of a mechanism (Spaceship Earth) which can be fixed by

experts if needed? Nature is respectively regarded as an interconnected and intrinsically valuable self-regulating entity that deserves respect, or as environment to be designed and used in the most effective way to benefit humans. Faith in human abilities and knowledge is strong in both instances, but the reductionist perspective places more trust in human technological innovations, whereas the holistic perspective additionally trusts the experiential wisdom of traditional and intentional communities and the wisdom of nature, considering it a master of complex homoeostasis that people are only learning to understand and can learn a lot from. Although both approaches are anthropocentric, the dominating reductionist perspective has been described as a uniquely anthropocentric utilitarian approach to nature common to the Western world that has led to the current crises (e.g. by White and Merchant*).* Merchant described the accompanying disrespectful attitude to the surrounding world "the death of nature" (Merchant 1980), and White suggested that this change in relationship to nature has been the greatest psychological revolution, creating an entirely new culture (White 2008: 43). Similarly to civil society actors he doubts if this reductionist culture is able to survive its own influence and if more of the same approach, i.e. more technology and more science, will help to find a way out of this complex situation. Along similar lines the CS actors often quoted Albert Einstein saying that the system cannot be changed from the same level of thinking that created it. White argues similarly to Hardin (see 3.1.1.) that the weak sustainability approach excluding ethical considerations does not offer a sustainable basis for human development as it lacks a sense of respect and responsibility necessary to ensure long-term sustainability.

### 5.2.2.5. A new narrative is not enough as a solution

The central solution for turning towards more sustainable development that emerged from the analysis was creating a new story. The need for a new story as a solution to the crises was suggested by research participants in the sample as well as a number of researchers including Merchant, Liftin, Sahtouris and White (see also 5.1.). Seeing a new narrative as a solution was rooted in recognition that the current narrative (paradigm, vision, culture) was not functioning any more. By producing too negative, scary, overwhelming or grim visions of the future it was considered to fail to engage and resulted in too limited or harmful results. So in many cases the faulty story was believed to be the reason for the current sustainability crises. Thomas Berry sums up this perspective nicely:

> "*It's all a question of story. We are in trouble now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it, is no longer effective"* (Berry 1998: 123).

Developing a new, more positive, relatable and inspiring narrative was believed to help to change the course of development and move towards more sustainable development. To communicate this need, different research participants used different expressions, speaking of the need for a paradigm change or shift, a new culture, a positive or creative vision, or a change in mind-sets. It is believed that with a new narrative the vision of oneself, of the world and the future will change and as a result of this deep cultural transformation also the underlying legitimising norms, values and habitual patterns are reconsidered and changed. For example, White and Hardin have argued similarly for the need to adopt a new set of basic values that would cast aside the underlying assumption that the value of nature depends on its use to human beings (Hardin 1968, White 2008). White suggests that unless such a paradigm shift happens, the survival of the democratic culture is highly unlikely (White 2008: 37).

Whereas most civil society research participants were hoping for a change of narrative, the actors on the governance level had already experienced the economising turn as a change or

narrative[36]. For example, the EU sustainability expert commented that even though this change narrowed the thematic scope, it was a positive change as starting to use quantitative language significantly facilitated mutual understanding and cooperation with other departments and units (for more details, see 3.3.2.1., 4.2.4. and 5.1.1.). The civil society actors in the sample did not notice the economising turn probably because the governance approach with its weak sustainability stance and reductionist approach had to them seemed economised already before the turn in 2010.

Adopting a new positive story is surely better than living according to a destructive story. However, there is no lack of narratives in the world. Neither the civil society plea for simple living within natural limits, nor the governance plea for encouraging progress by modifying nature to fit human needs, are new. White has also argued that the thought and language patterns creating certain behaviours have remained largely the same during the last 1700 years (White 2008: 44). So it seems difficult to imagine how a new story, be it as good as it might, could become universally accepted by different stakeholders in Europe in order to have the power to transform the whole way of life – unless it is undemocratically forced upon people. As pointed out in the working definition of sustainable development (5.1.5.), I stand for a more systematic and integrative approach to SD as it seems more suitable to address the complex multilevel crises than the more disconnected reductionist approach. However, the holistic belief in interconnectedness by placing such trust in a new story to solve the sustainability issues seems far-fetched. It is relevant to work towards counterbalancing the dominating mechanistic and economised development perspective tending to tackle problems separately from each other. For that, alternative narratives supporting an alternative culture to the consumer society are necessary. However, it is also relevant to keep in mind that people, cultures and local settings are different, so the plan of a new story solving the problems seems oversimplified and exaggerated. The continuing competition between the big religious metanarratives (and sadly, fighting between their proponents), hoping to become universally accepted and save the world, serves as an example of how difficult it is for one story to address and convince the whole world.

So I argue that creating a new narrative is not enough. Rather than that I believe that a more multi-layered solution is needed involving the slow, but stable "one heart at the time" transformations on the microlevel, active profit and third sectors, and well-negotiated and informed governance regulations with functioning feedback loops. This would include different stakeholders bringing their approaches to the table and negotiating them in an open and reflective manner, seeking win-win solutions. This would be substantially facilitated by building capacity for intra- and interpersonal literacy.

### 5.2.2.6. Building capacity for intrapersonal skills and inner literacy

Nowadays the development of inner literacy and intra- and interpersonal skills is left pretty much to chance depending on family, school and socio-cultural settings. The main focus of our educational systems is on learning about the world around us. Even if psychology is taught, it is often more an overview of its history and approaches than a practical set of methods to be used as tools in daily life. So people are often unaware of their inner processes and suffer without knowing how to deal with their thoughts, emotions and habits. This can easily lead to difficulties in interpersonal communication and cooperation. It would be helpful to take up personal and interpersonal sustainability as fields of study to explore the situation and co-develop well-functioning toolkits to help people in different socio-cultural settings and social groups to increase their intra- and intrapersonal literacy and consequently, their wellbeing.

[36] In fact, this change was intentionally planned by the then head of DG Environment to raise the profile of environmental issues. See subchapters 3.3.2.1. and 4.2.4. for more details.

Language enables us to interpret the world and share our experiences, feelings and ideas with others. By enabling us to cultivate the abstract cultural world, language radically increases human freedom: it gives us a certain independence from the physical world. The cultural dimension of human life gives us the ability to bring into the shared reality also such information that is not based on inputs from our five senses and predetermined by our biological legacy (Deely 2005a: 92). The biologist and semiotician Jesper Hoffmeyer has argued that the general expansion of "semiotic freedom" is the most pronounced feature of organic evolution (Hoffmeyer 1996: 61). This means the increase in richness and depth of meaning that can be communicated. So the ability to stitch together culture and nature, real and unreal relations gives us relatively greater semiotic freedom in comparison to other known sign users. It has enabled the situation where socio-cultural norms replace or override to a certain extent the socio-biological constraints governing the rest of the animal kingdom. It seems that overexploitation of this species-specific freedom has paved the way to exceeding the limits to growth resulting in the sustainability crisis.

Bernard Victorri has hypothesised that the emergence of the narrative function is the starting point of the emergence of language (Victorri 2007). The human being who lives according to certain narrative(s) he or she is inculturated into could be called *homo narrans* (Victorri 2007). As people that follow certain narratives that give meaning and sense to their lives, both *homo oeconomicus* and *homo sustinens* (Siebenhühner 2001) could be regarded as subtypes of *homo narrans*. In the context of this research, *homo oeconomicus* represents the efficiency-oriented reductionist metanarrative of change common to the governance "economising turn" development approach. *Homo sustinens* represents the civil society "reintegrating turn" development approach that stands for the sufficiency-oriented (more or less) holistic metanarrative of change. It could be argued that for *homo oeconomicus* the development of matter is central and for *homo narrans* the development of relationships is essential. To overcome the division between the *homo oeconomicus* and *homo sustinens,* it seems reasonable not to create a further story to follow – after all, both are narrators – but to prioritise the development of intrapersonal literacy and reflexivity in order to be able to transcend the limits of narratives that habitually define our lives. John Deely has called a person with enlarged semiotic freedom for shaping its surroundings or Umwelt *homo semioticus* and argued that this freedom arises from conscious observing of the process of semiosis (the process of signification) and reflecting upon it (Deely 2005). So perhaps we could call a person who prioritises the development of awareness and meaning-making freedom *homo semioticus*. Such a person is more reflexive, able to recognise different narratives and consequently freer in making choices – a human aware of the meaning-making processes (semiosis). According to John Deely *homo semioticus* is aware that reflecting upon semiosis is happening in the framework of a wider context which he or she is utterly dependent on (Deely 2005b: 227-228). So, while having more freedom to understand and change the situation, *homo semioticus* is also more aware of depending on the settings she or he lives in.

It is the meaning-making freedom characteristic to *homo semioticus* that builds the basis for the ability to transcend the limits of one's own metanarrative(s) and understand those of others. This ability is part of inner literacy. Indeed, becoming aware of underlying mental, emotional and habitual patterns could be the key to building inner literacy that can significantly facilitate change processes that tend to get stuck in (bad) habits. I understand inner literacy as a set of skills and capacities that help people to learn to understand and deal with their inner processes. This involves the ability to stop processes that are harmful to oneself and others and cultivating those that support inner and intrapersonal wellbeing. It also involves adopting a more systemic and responsible approach to life and developing the capacity of critical thinking and reflection. This does not mean that one has to be critical *per se*, but taking the time to reflect on the situation or idea before taking things at face value.

Fostering reflexivity also helps to create conditions for finding common ground for cross-sectoral cooperation.

Giddens and Beck have considered reflexivity a characteristic trait of current late (or high) modernity, calling it an era of reflexive modernisation (Beck 2000, Giddens 2000). Giddens claims that while in traditional societies people would be provided with a narrative and a social role, in the post-traditional society people are forced to create these themselves either discursively or though day-to-day social behaviour (Giddens 1991: 70). Referring to the relevance of narratives in shaping human lives, he maintains that nowadays identity is not rooted in actions or reactions of others, but rather in the ability of an individual to keep a certain reflexive narrative going (1991: 54). While agreeing with the general premise, I disagree with the notion that in the current times people are *per se* free to construct their identity and narrative(s) themselves. Firstly, the legitimizing and world-shaping function of cultural narratives has not disappeared. Secondly, a huge amount of processes shaping our lives take place unconsciously. The majority of people do not create their world through reflexive awareness, but through automatic impulses and reactions, which is why narratives continue to play a big role in human lives.

Indeed, using, constructing and deconstructing narratives with the help of dichotomies remains a basic human way of making sense of the world. Liftin has argued that ecovillages represent a postmodern perspective that aims to consciously transcend modern dichotomies (e.g. local-global, expert-lay person, affluence-poverty, private-public, see Liftin 2009: 127). However, analysis shows that ecovillagers as well as other members of the sample continue to use and construct dichotomies. Operating with dichotomies is a basic human identity-building mechanism and thus it is not important to avoid them. However, it is important to be aware and mindful of using them and noticing their impact. When situations change, old dichotomies and narratives can cease to be helpful. So without growing in our ability to be (self-)reflexive, change on the individual, communal as well as societal levels is likely to become tangled in habitual patterns that constitute our normality.

It remains an open question if it is possible to exit the narrative nature of human culture or if the solution of increasing independence and freedom from the narratives that habitually define our lives will also become a narrative. It probably will, which is fine as long as inner literacy skills remain active and used, allowing people to defamiliarise themselves from their norms at will. What helps us to look beyond our own perspective is the process of disenchantment from our habitual ways of thinking, acting and perceiving the world. It can occur as a result of surprising events, such as experiencing completely different value systems and ways of life, or without outer stimuli as a result of insights. The experience of case study participants tackling inner issues in relation to sustainable development shows that when people are too busy with daily activities and don't take time for reflection, they also tend to lack openness and understanding for other perspectives.

So it seems that the well-known, but contradicting quotes by Karl Marx and Margaret Mead about the actors' level of freedom and impact on societal processes are both true. Marx argued that human agency is restricted by preconceived conditions inherited from past generations:

> *"Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under the circumstances chosen by themselves, but under the circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living"* (Marx 1978: 595).

In an unreflexive course of things, when people automatically follow the beliefs, values and behaviours they were inculturated into, the tradition of the previous generations indeed informs their

thoughts, emotions and actions[37]. Such an unreflective way of living continues to be considered normal nowadays. On the other hand, the quote from Mead about the freedom of groups of people to make a difference can be valid: "*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has*" (Lutkehaus 2008: 261). When a group of reflective and committed people have become aware of their situation and are dedicated to making a difference, they have the possibility to transcend the constraints of limiting metanarratives, find new perspectives and develop innovative solutions. The central difference lies in the type of action: automatic (reactionary) or intentional (proactive), with the latter carrying the power to make changes happen. So reflexivity and intentionality can help to transcend the limiting metanarratives.

Well-developed inner literacy increases personal sustainability and can help people to deal with changing circumstances, making them more resilient. However, it may also support societal changes to take place. Indeed, developing intra- and interpersonal literacy is a field of knowledge that would facilitate moving towards knowledge society. Under knowledge society I mean a self-reflexive and self-corrective development model capable of multiplying the collective intellect and competence. In fact, it seems that what was described as knowledge society in Estonian and Portuguese NSDS, and as "learning society" in the German NSDS when describing a model needed for moving towards sustainable development, fits quite well with the direction of change that the CS groups would like to move towards.

Giddens and Chomsky have been hopeful that new social movements may lead to more social changes than political parties. According to Giddens this could lead through "democratisation of democracy" to a new era of Habermasian "dialogic democracy" in which differences are settled through discourse rather than violence or the commands of authority (Ritzer 2003)[38]. Chomsky has argued that the solution to the problems is in the hands of the people who are much more powerful than they seem to think. Talking about the relevance of grassroots empowerment he suggests that making a difference requires people to take responsibility: "*It is not that there are no alternatives. The alternatives just aren't being taken. That is dangerous. So if you ask what the world is going to look like, it is not a pretty picture. Unless people do something about it. We always can"* (Chomsky 2013). Taking responsibility and trying to make intentional proactive changes is something that the civil society actors in the sample have done successfully. They have skills and practices that could be upscaled to support transition processes. However, case study analysis showed that in several cases upscaling civil society models for change failed due to their inability to make the benefits of their model clear to the governance level and the unwillingness of the governance level to exit their comfort zone (see e.g. the LDI Germany case).

Reflexivity has much to do with how well people understand the motivations and implications of their own actions as well as wider societal processes. This research indicates that the main reasons keeping people from using their change-making potential is that they:

- actually don't see a need for change and there is no outer pressure to motivate them,
- see a need, but are too busy with daily activities to change their habits and continue as before,
- are intimidated by the scale of the task or discouraged by negative comments and experiences.

My experience as a sustainability researcher working on transdisciplinary research projects with practitioners from different fields including municipalities and civil society initiatives, is that having enough knowledge about sustainable development does not mean that people are able to translate it to action and change their behaviour, habitual thinking and feelings to start living in a different manner.

[37] The circumstances are not limited to cultural traditions, but this aspect is in focus here.
[38] This concept has similarities with the knowledge society model.

This can lead to a gap between words and actions. Referring to the communist repressive regime with censorship and limited freedom of speech, the Estonian NSDS describes the "duplicity syndrome" as a type of cognitive gap whereby people act "as one should" in public, whereas their talk and deeds in private differ (SE21 2005: 42). This syndrome seems quite present also in democratic societies. Indeed, developing methods for overcoming the cognitive gap between public and private behaviour by walking their talk is what makes the proactive civil society groups so interesting.

So it seems that unless outer conditions become urgent and pressing enough to make change inevitable (in case of natural or man-made catastrophes or totalitarian regime, for instance), change begins on the individual level with a change in the mind-set. If the pressure comes from outside, the change might be faster, but once conditions change, it is likely that the behaviour changes back more easily. This further underlines the relevance of integrating and investing more in developing knowledge about human functioning as a relevant criteria facilitating or hindering change on individual as well as group level. Thus far the inner dimension has remained an unknown terrain and mental health issues are tackled mostly only if mental disorders occur. Acquiring intra- and interpersonal skills has thus far been largely left to chance in our late/postmodern Western societies and changing the attitude towards these fields could significantly contribute to overcoming the situation of urgent rhetoric and slow pace of actions.

Moving towards a more sustainable development requires the combination of inner and outer change processes to succeed. Having a vision is relevant as it gives a direction to move towards, so having inspiring narratives is relevant. But it needs to be accompanied by working towards rehumanising the mainstream development perception by explicitly including cultural issues, developing intra- and interpersonal skills and capacities for becoming aware of how existing narratives shape our lives and how to communicate and cooperate more effectively, building a basis for finding win-win solutions. For bridging the cognitive gaps between knowing and doing, also broadening the scope of accepted knowledge is needed.

### 5.2.2.7. Broadening the scope of accepted knowledge

The complex task of reaching sustainable development can be described as a utopian aspiration – a never-ending and ever-changing aspiration towards a better, more just and viable way of life. What is fascinating about this longing is that the envisioned solutions have so different and even contradicting expressions, ranging from growth to degrowth, globalisation to relocalisation, individualisation to recreating communities.

In itself, one approach discussed in this study is not more valid than the other, as they both express lived experiences of certain groups of people. However, as these approaches produce real consequences, it can be said that in certain contexts one produces results that are more supportive of long-term sustainable development than the other. In a healthy system it can be presumed that feedback loops lend the development approach flexibility for adapting to changing circumstances. However, it seems that some of the feedback loops of the economised development direction do not function in a way that allows making appropriate changes quickly enough to respond to ecological and socio-cultural changes in an adequate manner. To unfreeze the system and bring in new ideas, broadening the scope of accepted knowledge is necessary.

The European civil society and governance approaches to sustainable development discussed in this study have different views on what sustainable development is. The different approaches to development trust in different ways of knowing. The situation could perhaps be compared to the metaphor of blind people describing an elephant – what can seem as absolute truth from one

standpoint, using one set of criteria, can seem relative or even false from another point of view. Exploring the same elephant, the groups use different criteria for describing it and consider different sources of knowledge legitimate. Side-lining alternatives does not allow to yield the benefits of diversity, which is a much better source of innovation than a monopoly of truth. It is through systematic cooperation and consideration of all participants' perspectives that a picture can be put together. This requires much tolerance, patience and awareness for not jumping to conclusions.

Indeed, it can be said that the innovative character of the civil society approach lies in its flexibility, and openness to learn, share, combine and co-develop different approaches. The reconnecting approach considers it relevant to also learn from older generations, traditional cultures and local groups – and perhaps most importantly – with them, using the co-creative perspective, which could be described as collaborative and empowering levels of the participation ladder (Stauffacher et al. 2008, see below under cooperation). Being able to accept different ways of knowing as equally relevant requires developing reflexive capacities and tolerance.

Also a number of researchers have argued for the need to broaden the spectrum of legitimate knowledge influencing the development in our Western societies. For example, the biologist Brian Goodwin and the folklorist Marilyn Motz have emphasised the relevance of intuitive knowledge as a specific way of knowing necessary for insights on how to make new connections and find new solutions (Brockman 1997, Motz 1998). Motz has argued that intuitive knowledge is one legitimate way of knowing, very intrinsic to human societies and the fact that it cannot be evaluated with measuring sticks of modern science does not undermine it (1998: 340). Goodman has claimed that science has denied subjectivity for the past 400 years, creating the basis for a very one-sided development (Brockman 1997). Indeed, the economised development approach has more power and influence, so their version of what sustainable development is tends to dominate. To balance this perspective, more attention could be given to the holistic approach arguing for reintegrating qualitative criteria into the development equation. An open and intentional discussion would allow for new perspectives to sustainable development, including both the externally observable, quantifiable and "objective" ways of knowing as well as internal and qualitative, experiential and "subjective" ways[39]. This would allow developing a more systemic view of the situation considering also the context, subjective experience and intuitive knowledge.

Both levels consider lifelong learning necessary to support sustainable development. What differentiates between the levels is which kind of knowledge is considered relevant and reliable. The civil society approach is open for different kinds of knowledge, also from alternative sources, that are usually discarded by the governance approach. An example of this openness is their tendency to also look to the (past) experiences of previous generations and traditional cultures for practices and examples of sustainable living. This openness for (re)discovering the old, traditional and practical knowledge as a possible source of innovation is expressed in the frequent use of the prefix "re-" (reconnecting, relocalising, reskilling etc., see e.g. 4.3.2.). The civil society approach also sees nature as a complex self-regulating system that people know relatively little about and can learn a lot from. Similarly, it is believed that people are too strongly focused on the outer world and know too little about their inner spheres, even though these have a decisive impact on how they behave and which impact they make.

The second main difference is in openness for experimental knowledge. The civil society level is quite open to experimental solutions. All included civil society initiatives and networks have engaged in local experiments of sustainable living and introduce their experiences and methods also to

[39] Liftin has described the governance approach as modernist as it tries to rely on objectivity of statistics and quantifiable data, whereas the civil society actors are closer to the postmodern relativist view (Liftin 2009).

other interested parties. The governance level, on the other hand, has the obligation to ensure stability and at least seeming control over the developments. Their systems are relatively rigid and openness and adaption for change and new ideas relatively (s)low. This was also mentioned by several research participants from both levels, adding that new initiatives and ideas should rather come from the third and profit sectors. Considering the obligation of the business sector to survive and thrive in the capitalist competitive system, their openness for experiments is also often limited and their perspective is mostly informed by the reductionist perspective. This is why it is so relevant for the sake of diversity that civil society groups would consolidate their efforts and build capacity for communicating and cooperating across sectors in a way that allows generating wider acceptance for their experimental practices. More consolidated civil society actors, capable and interested in presenting the benefits of their approaches in an understandable manner to the governance and business sectors could be a realistic way for moving towards a more open and diverse vision of sustainable development. The approaches of the civil society actors are context sensitive, which can be beneficial for avoiding "one-size-fits-all" solutions and encouraging more dialogue on local needs and solutions. The civil society level in Europe seems to be in a good position to encourage engaging in what the sociologist Matthias Gross has called "experimental not-knowing" (2010). Showing that the uncertainty of experimenting with possible solutions is perfectly acceptable and can lead to innovative solutions could be a significant contribution of the civil society actors.

Regarding wisdom and uncertainty as interrelated states of being makes uncertainty something useful rather than unpleasant (Tamm 2013a). This view could be helpful for facilitating the spread of openness for accepting experimental practices also on the governance level. As Gross put it: more honesty and openness about the limits of knowledge can be used as a strategy for fostering public trust and encouraging participation in public experiments (Gross 2010: 165-66).

Indeed, sustainable development can be seen as a quest to the unknown with many unidentified variables that can change the course of development without us knowing or controlling the process. In this context, deepening openness to accepting not-knowing and developing inquisitive mindsets to explore options for dealing with them would be a great asset. Engaging in experiments for systematically and critically identifying and exploring ways for balancing the reductionist and holistic approaches with participants across sectors could be a really beneficial practice for the municipal, but also national and perhaps later also the whole EU level.

Furthermore, the experimental and experiential explorations can also support building inner literacy – a field that is undeservingly underdeveloped in our Western societies. As the literary scholar Noam Chomsky, who in his later years has been very optimistic about the transformative potential of civil society movements put it: "*We can learn about ourselves and others by imaginative exploration and experiment, which should be encouraged. Some of these experiments seem to me really inspiring*" (Raptis and Fotopoulos 1999).

In fact, the whole current way of life can be described as a big real-life experiment that the power-structures, mostly informed by the reductionist metanarrative of change, are conducting with the whole humanity and everything else on the planet as the sample. Missing from a fully-fledged experiment are neutral observers, control over the processes and the ability to repeat the experiment. For me the essence of living in the world risk society and Anthropocene is that our species has become more influential than ever before, but the knowledge on what exactly we are doing and responsibility for this experiment remains vague, even though the risks are high.

As participants of different layers of the society, people in the increasingly globalised systems have often no idea of their impact on the system. In many ways the system that we inhabit in the North has become so complex that it has lost transparency. The simplest small-scale example is that the majority of people have no idea where the products that they use daily and that surround them came

from and under which conditions they were produced and transported. The globalised economic system has disconnected us from our food, our clothes and household objects. Most of what the consumer society daily uses comes from places where it is cheap to produce, not where it is produced in the best way or closest to the market or where people most need work. A cheap production price is in the service of a cheap selling price which is relevant for keeping up economic growth. Also, the quality of products cannot be too good, as this would cause less consumption, which would lead to slowing down economic growth. The principle of economic efficiency has subjugated all other arguments and the results are often not sustainable from a more systemic perspective. Looking more closely, the system working for economic growth and efficiency is still perpetuating inequality and continues to damage the health of people, other living beings and ecosystems. It seems that as such, the global growth-oriented economised development approach is incompatible with the goal of ensuring long-term sustainable development that should aim towards fitting again within the limits to growth to enable the natural systems to regenerate and (hopefully) restore their resilience.

#### 5.2.2.8. Building interpersonal capacity: fostering cross-sectoral synergy

All the principal documents, programs and strategies included in the sample emphasise the relevance of broad public support and participation for achieving sustainable development. Analysis shows that the main obstacle hindering the development of a more broad-based cooperation across sectors is ideological.

It has been long asked if it is realistic to bring contemporary democratic, capitalist systems in line with the requirements posed by the sustainable development agenda (e.g. Pelinka 1978, Doherty, de Geus 1996, Jasanoff 2004). The answer depends on which sustainable living agenda we are talking about. The governance efficiency-oriented weak sustainability agenda could be realised more easily, while the civil society´s sufficiency-oriented strong sustainability agenda would require a systems change.

Although the civil society groups in the sample don't use a confrontational approach that characterised social movements for decades (Staggenborg 2007), they still want to change the system – either as part of the system (e.g. 4.1.1.4.) or by exiting it (e.g. 4.1.2.1.). Part of that non-confrontational approach is working within the system to make a difference, as it is believed that cooperation yields better results than confrontation. There are critics who consider the idea of achieving a significant change without building up radically new structures naïve and ineffective. For example, Takis Fotopoulos and Mary Garden have deemed the representatives of the holistic approach, especially ecovillagers, self-indulgent, escapist and utopian, unable to impact the powerful global structures that perpetuate socioeconomic injustice and environmental degradation, using the current structure to build alternatives for a small circle of people (Fotopoulos 2000, 2006, Garden 2006a, 2006b). There are also critical voices among the civil society networks (e.g. 4.1.1.3. under Problems) considering their current impact too local and the change primarily perpetuated through personal and group example, awareness raising and educational outreach too slow and modest.

However, there are also those who consider this cooperative approach realistic. Among the proponents are for example Ted Trainer, known as the advocate of voluntary simplicity (e.g. Trainer 2000, 2002, 2006), or Noam Chomsky, who has expressed optimism about the power of individuals and groups to make a difference (Raptis and Fotopoulos 1999, Chomsky 2013). For the people following the holistic metanarrative, the lifestyle-centred small-scale solutions do not seem insufficient precisely because of the holistic perspective. While according to the reductionist view, one person or a small group of people cannot make a big difference, in a holistic system, where life is seen as an intertwined network, individuals and communities can have that power. In this perspective,

quality of change can be as important, or even more important than quantity. So whereas the small size and limited outreach can be interpreted as low impact by an outside observer, for an insider a well done small (or inner) activity might be the best possible contribution to the overall transformation. For instance, many in the GEN network believe that inner qualitative change precedes outer change, for example that solving the climate change challenge starts from the inner climate change (Jackson 2009).

Most critics find it difficult to take the holistic perspective seriously. However, even without believing in the holistic "butterfly effect", the proactive approach trying to make a difference on a manageable local scale seems more reasonable than remaining passive. Furthermore, these initiatives and networks have developed educational programs, videos, web resources and books that help to spread their experiences to a broader circle of people beyond their members. Analysis of the civil society models shows that their local focus does not mean that their practices only suit specific needs – on the contrary, they have been used in different settings internationally, giving them a global appeal. Broadening what Karen Liftin (2009) wrote about the feasibility of ecovillages to the whole civil society approach: if these initiatives, communities and networks were isolated experiments, disconnected from one another and the larger social and political processes, they might not be of much interest. However, thousands of urban and rural projects and communities have come together in physical and virtual networks for sharing and disseminating information about sustainable living practices, offering a variety of accessible methods and practices which can be used in diverse settings.

In the earlier phases of research I also considered the "one heart at a time" approach too slow and small-scale in the face of the urgent problems. However, in the meantime I realised that this is the pace of individual change. It takes longer, but also yields more stable results, whereas change motivated by outer pressure or regulations is faster, but more easily reversed once the pressure is lifted.

If changes towards more sustainable ways of life were done in a compulsory way, it would be akin to ecological dictatorship, ecofascism. However, if it is done in the spirit of knowledge society, where interests and needs of all stakeholders are openly negotiated before decisions are made, and participation is not a facade but a substantial societal dialogue process working on new societal agreements, the change could generate innovative solutions with strong ownership. For a good result, both small-scale and cultural as well as large-scale and structural changes need to take place in parallel, reinforcing each other and offering different people access points to join in on the Great Turning/Great Transformation.

**How to generate mutual openness and interest in cooperation?** There was often mutual ignorance or mistrust and neither the governance nor the civil society level had any certainty that the solutions offered by the other level (would) work. The efficiency-oriented weak sustainability approach is preferable from the governance perspective as it seems reasonable, requires fewer changes and minimal redistribution of power, whereas the strong sustainability approach is considered too radical and counterintuitive, tearing down existing systems without any guarantee of building a functioning alternative. On the other hand, the sufficiency-oriented strong sustainability perspective considers the current weak sustainability approach unviable and responsible for the dire socio-economic and ecological consequences, necessitating finding new ways of living that would stop harming nature, other humans and life-supporting conditions.

Could good quality of life, freedom, equity and happiness be achieved on the broader societal scale also under no economic growth or degrowth, using the sufficiency approach and strong sustainability stance, as the civil society vision foresees? The existing small scale examples do not support making general statements. So far, such solutions have proven useful on the individual and

communal levels reaching up to city and in some rare cases also national level (e.g. the national ecovillage initiative in Senegal[40]). The upscaling potential of the civil society practices to support transition on a larger scale remains an open question. It seems to me that the experiences and practices of the civil society networks for increasing local resilience and wellbeing are worth discussing in a bigger round and considered for upscaling. To succeed, it would also require long-term political openness, interest and support.

Why would the governance level in Europe consider the civil society strategies? Perhaps the reason best in line with the economised development approach is that the proactive voluntary actions of the civil society initiatives have saved governments millions and will continue to do so (e.g. the LDI initiatives by cleaning up thousands of tons of trash with voluntary action throughout Europe). Further, by encouraging people to take responsibility for making more sustainable choices on a daily basis, the civil society initiatives are reliable partners for furthering the shared agenda of reducing waste(fulness) and efficiency of resource use. In the context of the global crisis, the development from self-expression to considering collective well-being seems unavoidable and such movements can help to show that this can enrich rather than impoverish the quality of life, thus facilitating change processes. Also, as the CS initiatives are experienced in fostering inner change and dealing with interpersonal relationships, they can help to de-escalate conflicts, which can be beneficial for (mental) health and work productivity, helping to save on medical costs and support economic competitiveness. Furthermore, these initiatives continue to strengthen the civil society and social coherence by encouraging participation. The experience of initiative members has shown that doing meaningful work together with likeminded people for the local community creates rapport and fosters mutual understanding, lending a sense of wellbeing and a positive identity. The community-building approach and doable meaningful activities give people a sense of purpose and belonging which helps to deal with the uncertainty of our time. This links with what Giddens and Chomsky suggested when speaking of re-embedding as a strategy to help deal with unruly times (Giddens 1991, Mestrovic 1998, Chomsky 2013).

Sustainable development problems are often complex and finding solutions needs not only good technological solutions, but also social engagement and a willingness to experiment. Currently too many policies and regulations continue to be developed and implemented in a top-down "one size fits all" manner, with too little regard and sensitivity for local and cultural peculiarities and needs. Analysis showed that finding a consensus on value-related issues across Europe is considered unrealistic and it can be also difficult on the national scale, depending on the context. Turning towards smaller scales and more local solutions for discussing and agreeing on cultural and ethical norms seems the more feasible solution. The civil society actors in the sample are experienced in cooperative, creative and experimental expressions, so they could act as great partners by helping to engage local people, contributing ideas, methods and solutions and help to implement the agreed practices.

Perhaps it would make sense for the governance level to explore the experiences and practices of these initiatives a bit closer and consider testing out some of these practices. Joost Dessein and Svetlana Hristova have emphasised the need for developing policies not only to provide institutional or market structures and education for supporting innovations, but also for promoting transformations towards more holistically sustainable societies, e.g. through increased awareness and behaviour changes, innovative collaborations, multi-actor dialogues and new institutional arrangements (Dessein et al.

[40] For example, the Senegalese government launched a program to transition 14 000 traditional villages into ecovillages. See www.collective-evolution. com/2015/06/17/senegal-transformin-14000-villges-into-ecovillages/ (June 2015).

2015, Hristova et al. 2015). Hristova maintains that bottom-up and participatory approaches can help to create ideas and actions leading toward sustainable local communities, but without systemic support from the local government such initiatives cannot be sustainable in the long run (Hristova et al 2015).

Indeed, finding ways to generate governmental support for upscaling some of the civil society solutions could be a relevant game-changer in the current development direction. Such inclusive multi-scale cooperation could work as an innovation booster. Provided that that there is political interest, testing alternative solutions on local scales and then upscaling them with governance support could be a good way to make the leap from micro- to macro-scales to spread sustainable practices.

Upscaling requires openness for societal dialogue. I believe that the narrative approach can be helpful in facilitating mutual understanding and communication, paving way to a new way of cooperating, where ideological differences do not rule out negotiations and cooperation in order to find and realise shared goals.

**Improving cooperation and communication skills.** Despite the rhetoric emphasis that SD can only be achieved in closer cooperation between the sectors, there is an obvious lack of cross-sectoral cooperation skills and capacity that limits dialogue options. It has been argued that public participation has become something of a modern mantra employed in all sorts of contexts ranging from serious intentions to achieving the appearance of participation (Bell and Morse 2012). Even in Europe, cross-sectoral cooperation has been limited, unstable and unsystematic. Civil society partners have been calling such communication aimed at calming down stakeholders by giving them a seeming voice without any consequences "participation green-washing". In such cases, cooperation remains unequal, with one side having control.

The ladder of participation (Hart 1997, Stauffacher et al. 2008, Arnstein 2011) is a good tool for comparing the nature of participation that both levels engage in and expect. The ladder includes five degrees to participation intensity, progressing from sharing information and consultancy (both mainly involve one-way communication) over cooperation and collaboration to empowerment (information exchange with an increasing level of equality and authority). Comparing the different degrees of involvement and cooperation that the civil society and governance levels offered and expected at the time of research, we see significant differences. Across the GOV level information sharing, consultancy and cooperation counted as the main forms of participation, whereas on the CS level the main participation forms were cooperation, collaboration and empowerment. This scale helps to understand how different the expectations and needs across sectors were. Interviews indicated that even the least intensive forms of participation were often experienced as too time-intensive or demanding by government officials. The CS level on the other hand was interested in more intensive cooperation and collaboration, so they felt that their attempts to engage were not taken seriously despite their efforts. Consequently, both levels experience frustration: one feels overburdened or fails to see the relevance, whereas the other feels left aside and not taken seriously.

So it seems that both levels need to acquire new skills and capacities for overcoming the roadblocks hindering mutual learning, communication and cooperation. Below some suggestions for improving cooperation and communication success are provided, based on the observations made throughout the research and suggestions from participants from both levels. Some of these suggestions might seem trivial, but analysis shows that they are often either unknown or not implemented.

**General suggestions.** The most relevant suggestion for improving rapport is becoming aware of and leaving aside prejudices and undermining attitudes when communicating with other sectors. This also includes overcoming mistrust for the other party (e.g. they will not listen to us anyway; they are in the pocket of corporations; they are an uncoordinated bunch of hippies that cannot be trusted).

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, uneasiness ranging from discomfort to fear emerged as the main obstacle for cooperation on both levels. People don't like to leave their comfort zone and were often unwilling to accept that things can or at times, should be done differently. From the governance side, it was primarily the fear for complication, competition, being criticised or scrutinized about the details of one's work, or losing control over the situation (e.g. 4.1.3.2). Too much cooperation and transparency would decrease the level of freedom and "make things difficult" by producing extra work. From the civil initiatives side, the unease had primarily to do with fear for doing a lot of work and then be brushed off or blocked by some official for some unclear reason or losing one's identity and integrity by being seen as part of the greenwashing machine (political actors were often seen as liminal players without high ideals and solid principles, so being involved with them can possibly be judged as degrading). Interestingly, being overly confident also emerged as an obstacle. Feeling having the right, having done enough or being on the right track can have three types of consequences: first of all, complacency can lead to disinterest or reluctance to learn from others; secondly, there is less incentive for noticing and tackling internal problems, and thirdly, there is less interest in new activities and cooperation. This can lead to wasting resources for inventing something that is already successfully implemented somewhere else, instead of learning from those who already have the experience and the know-how.

The next suggestion is being open for more cross-sectoral meetings. It is not uncommon that the sectors are unaware of each other's problems, suggested solutions and troubled areas. Such meetings might be uncomfortable; neither side has dedicated funds or times for such networking. However, the resulting improved cross-sectoral communication and cooperation can generate innovative win-win solutions and avoid deepening problems. Openness for dialogue and really listening to the other side (as opposed to only hearing them out) are needed for making such meetings fruitful. Sometimes what the other party has to say does not seem to make sense or be significant, so it is consequently not granted serious consideration. This easily leads to misunderstandings, frustration and conflicts which can further complicate communication and cooperation efforts. Overcoming these difficulties requires respect and openness for compromises. It is relevant to be aware of and ready to "translate" between different sectors. Although words and concepts might be the same, it is relevant to keep in mind that different stakeholders interpret them differently and consequently have different expectations. To avoid problems, it is useful to pay attention to such differences and mediate between the parties to reach the goal.

The age of transparency requires building up new structures and finding communication strategies that support cross-sectoral understanding and cooperation and accommodate the needs and expectations of both sides. In the internet era citizens often feel a certain right to get answers to their inquiries and messages from the governance sector and are irritated when the reply does not come or takes long to arrive. The situation is especially difficult on the EU scale, where transparency for finding the right contact person is the lowest. The other side of the coin is that officials often feel overburdened by queries which do not seem relevant, as well as pressure to reply to avoid public disdain, which makes them feel distracted and cornered. The ICT solutions could significantly facilitate raising awareness of the interests of different societal actors in a balanced, informative manner, facilitating societal dialogue, negotiating new goals and identifying ways of achieving them, thus paving way towards a new cooperation culture. This could prove a good way to ensure more transparency and participation in decision-making, generating public interest and ownership to reach a more coherent society.

**Five practical suggestions for the civil society partners:**

1. Finding ways to participate. Research showed that it is often difficult for the CS initiatives to find resources to monitor relevant consultation and stakeholder events on the local, national or EU level. One option is to join forces with other likeminded groups as more inter-sectoral cooperation would help to divide the workload. It also makes sense to proactively introduce your agenda to relevant partners independently of consultations, e.g. in emails or phone calls, which can result in being invited to relevant discussions in the future.

2. Being as constructive as possible. Although most case study participants had already adopted a cooperative strategy, there were still a number of fears and prejudices related to cooperating with power structures. Building up well-functioning long-term relationships with local authorities can be a slow process. Staying in constructive dialogue despite occasional setbacks helps to explain your perspective, understand the other perspectives and build the basis for finding mutual interests and synergy.

3. Overcoming fragmentation. Fragmentation emerged as one of the main reasons why the governance level is often unaware of civil society networks, as well as their already developed and tested methods that could support SD. More consolidation would enable the civil society actors a stronger voice that could be more easily heard on the governance level. This can be achieved by joining forces with other likeminded people and initiatives to increase consolidation instead of submitting individual opinions. Representing as many people as possible raises the relevance of the expressed opinion. This would allow developing a much needed counterweight to the well-financed professional business lobby groups.

4. In terms of communication style it is best to remain neutral and to the point. A purposeful, consolidated, systematic and open approach is most likely to produce desirable results. It involves learning to formulate the point shortly, precisely and communicate it in a constructive manner to increase the chances of being understood. As the EU expert put it: *"Be concise and to the point. And provide tangible input. Say something meaningful that the commission services can use"* (CE, female, 40s). Making the messages visible and understandable requires some degree of professionalization that the CS networks and initiatives are often unable to afford due to lacking time and finances or have avoided, e.g. for fear of losing their identity. Joining forces with bigger, more professional organisations that unite likeminded people to raise the relevance and clarity of the message and communicate it in a manner that gets noticed and heard would be a helpful tactic.

5. Getting attention. Waiting for a reply for an inquiry from governance structures can take a long time. It is often more efficient and less frustrating for all sides if citizens turn to representative structures (e.g. environmental or human rights organisations, national parliament or European Parliament representatives) for asking their questions, resulting in faster replies from experts who get a list of questions to reply instead of having to reply to individual mails. Moreover, experience has shown that building public interest and pressure through different outreach channels and media attention can help to raise the relevance of the issue and render the governance level more open for cooperation.

**Five practical suggestions for the governance partners:**

1. Lowering the high participation threshold. Cooperation formats are often open only to preselected stakeholders, who are seen as experts in certain fields, limiting the scope of included perspectives

to those considered traditionally relevant. Furthermore, governance actors organise consultations and expect interest groups to be aware of when these take place and to ask their questions there. Alternatively, they are publicly announced on a webpage, which requires that the civil society groups follow the activities of relevant administrative bodies and offer themselves as partners for consultations or other stakeholder events. However, most civil society actors are volunteer-based initiatives and networks that do not have enough human resources, time and finances for such monitoring and attendance in national capitals or in Brussels.

2. Considering civil society actors and messages seriously. Research showed that despite the attempts to integrate more public participation practices in the policy-making processes, the development priorities still depend on business interests. The CS actors often felt side-lined, as governance representatives tended to hear them out without really listening or considering their suggestions. In cases when civil society actors had the experience that the governance level was not taking them as serious partners and was merely "playing participation", this had to do with more than the civil society groups being fragmented and sending mixed messages. It also had to do with the content of their messages. This surfaced for example when officials did not know what to do with ethical questions or suggestions that contradicted the political main line (e.g. considering sufficiency, localisation or degrowth practices). Consequently, civil society partners felt that decisions concerning their lives were made over their heads and were disappointed with the "participation greenwashing". To support social coherence and achieve better rapport, paying attention to all stakeholder inputs and giving them satisfactory feedback, also on why specific issues are not considered further, needs to be intentionally practiced. This is relevant to keep the dialogue going and reduce the impression that inclusion is just a formality.

3. Exiting the comfort zone. Strong discomfort or even fear emerged as one of the main obstacles blocking better cooperation and communication with the civil society level. This included, for example, fear for extra work that might result from cooperation, fear of competition or being criticised, fear for having to take additional responsibility and discomfort about the little known partners and their reliability. Such reactions can lead to avoidance of contact and cooperation. This can frustrate civil society partners and encourage them to abandon further cooperation attempts. In single cases this might be a relief for the officials, but on the long run this does not help to increase social cohesion and ownership.

4. Developing and implementing participation formats beyond consultations. Research indicated that over the European SD decade the governance level opened up to more participative approaches, but the main forms of participation are sharing information, consultancy and to some extent, cooperation. The civil society level is interested in more collaborative cooperation formats where they can have more influence on the processes such as citizen cafés and open spaces. In addition, developing and testing ICT-based formats that would enable lowering the participation threshold and enable co-creative development with minimal demands to resources. ICT solutions can be helpful, but they must be accompanied by other societal transitions, including value change.

5. Allocating more resources to collaborative and experimental sustainable development projects explicitly with civil society initiatives and networks. This would help to show from one side that the governance level continues to prioritise sustainable development issues, and from the other side, enable people to bring in their ideas and directly influence the processes for the better. Such collaboration would have the potential to raise innovation potential, as well as quality of life and social coherence.

# 5.3. Conclusions: contributions, limitations and reflections

This section sums up the contributions of this study for understanding the sustainable development processes and scene in Europe, outlines the limitations and reflects on the research process.

## 5.3.1. Contributions

Considering that the central aim of GT research is to explain the participants' main concerns and ways of resolving them with as much variation as possible, the central practical contribution of this study could be increasing the self-awareness of research participants, helping them to understand themselves and other stakeholders better. More specifically, the practical suggestions for increasing rapport between the civil society and governance levels could serve as a contribution for increasing mutual understanding, paving the way to finding common ground and developing new cooperation strategies.

Dismantling the seeming consensus on SD and explicating the diversity of meanings and practices is one of the key contributions of this thesis. The cyclical and systematic GT approach coupled with new data gathered for this research made it possible to look beyond the rhetoric consensus stating that sustainable development is needed and draw attention to some aspects which had not received sufficient attention. For example it helped to shed light on reasons for the gaps between the urgent rhetoric and fragmented actions that could be observed to some degree on both levels. There were several shared reasons for such gaps, including lacking capacity and fragmentation. In rhetoric, the relevance of a broad participation for achieving SD is stressed, but it is difficult to realise this ideal with limited time, manpower and finances. Lacking resources also lead to the second problem, fragmentation. On the civil society level, fragmentation was the main reason why their voice was silent and views were not broadly known. On the governance level, the situation during the EU SD decade was difficult because the EU had two overarching development strategies. There were people who advocated the more integrative development approach and stressed the relevance of social and ecological concerns and those who had a more economised view, and this multitude caused tensions and confusion. After the economising turn this tension was somewhat solved, as the whole narrative adopted a more quantitative and economised nature. Another reason for the gaps is that whereas SD is something which "needs to be done", achieving it requires changes on different levels that can be uncomfortable, expensive and make power positions fallible. However, it is relevant to note that different stakeholders in the sample perceived these gaps differently. For example, proponents of the strong sustainability model considered the efforts of the weak sustainability practitioners insufficient and observed gaps where the others saw none, or the proponents of the reductionist perspective did not see how the holistic solutions could achieve the aimed results because the key to change was understood differently.

It also helped to debunk the claim that sustainable development is already mainstreamed in Europe. It leaves many internal inconsistencies without sufficient attention, and calls for further research. Furthermore, the situation across different member states and stakeholders has been quite diverse, which creates doubt in the legitimacy and credibility of this claim. Formally, looking at how many documents have been created by the EU and the member states concerning sustainable development, this claim has some ground. However, taking a closer look at the status quo beyond the rhetoric, the vast diversity of situations in the union is revealed, as well as the inconvenient truth that sustainability concerns have been exceedingly sacrificed on the political level in favour of economic growth and competitiveness.

The results of the analysis also enabled identifying waves of sustainability dynamics in Europe, listed in subchapter 5.3.1.2. The most relevant shift took place when the "European sustainable development decade" of the 2000nds ended and gave way to "Economising turn" characterised by a change of development narrative. These observations on sustainable development dynamics in Europe bear to some extent on all EU member states, so it could be considered among the main contributions.

Economic growth, efficiency and globalisation as the keys to increasing well-being and progress are the central credos of the economised governance approach that can hardly be second-guessed without losing credibility. Even if the sustainability experts did not consider the economising turn sensible, they admitted that there was no alternative to growth. This analysis highlighted the negative impacts of the dominating efficiency and growth oriented development perspective. Most importantly, it has been failing to ensure intra- and intergenerational equity and long-term sustainability, making us all participants of a risky real life experiment informed by the weak sustainability approach. Another problem of the reductionist approach is that it tends to marginalise and sideline qualitative and cultural aspects from the development discussions. This means that the quantitative logic rules over qualitative aspects in shaping the development agenda, which is one of the causes for the current sustainability crises. Excluding cultural and worldview-related aspects from SD discussions on the grounds of them being too confusing, difficult to measure and agree upon, actually means that the already existing values and cultural aspects are not open for debate. This demonstrates that there is no readiness to look beyond the dominating metanarrative to see if there could be other viable alternatives. This grounded theory suggests that it would be beneficial to work towards balancing the dominating mechanistic and economised development perspective tending to tackle problems separately from each other. As the current approach has proven insufficient, the governance level has the responsibility to exit its comfort zone and take the lead to test out new approaches. It is suggested that a more integrated approach to development would be beneficial to foster involvement and create a sense of positive responsibility and ownership.

This study also contributes by showcasing the relevance of cultural aspects and narratives in the sustainable development processes. Tracing and analysing different rhetoric and practices of sustainable development in Europe indicated that the core differences between the governance "economising turn" and civil society "reintegrating turn" approaches boil down to different ways of understanding the human role and its relationship with the surrounding world. As the theoretical discussion showed, these two ways can be traced back to holistic and reductionist metanarratives of change. Do we understand ourselves as participants in a complex self-regulating system, or as managers of a mechanism (Spaceship Earth) which can be fixed by experts if needed? Nature is respectively regarded as an interconnected and intrinsically valuable self-regulating entity that requires respect, or as environment that should be designed and used in the most effective way to benefit people. Faith in human abilities and knowledge is strong in both instances, but the reductionist and weak sustainability-oriented perspective trusts more in human technological innovations, whereas the holistic perspective additionally trusts the wisdom of nature, considering it a master of complex homoeostasis that people are only learning to understand and can learn a lot from. The civil society level also trusts more in the practical wisdom of traditional and intentional communities. Although both approaches are anthropocentric, it seems that whereas the civil society approach tries to broaden the focus and also draw the interests of other living beings into the spotlight, the governance logic places the abstract aims of raising competitiveness, efficiency and ensuring green growth to the centre, side-lining the always locally motivated and informed humans from the focus.

Living according to different metanarratives means that people often interpret the same phenomena in different ways. This can easily lead to misunderstandings and decreases the likeliness and efficiency of cooperation between the actors. When there is no understanding of cultural issues and their impact, it can be difficult to comprehend that the way things are believed and perceived to be, is not the only way. The governance metanarrative is devoid of several motivational aspects which drive the civil society and are qualitative in nature. It was often argued that it is nearly impossible to include cultural issues in SD discussions, for instance on the EU level, as this would create much confusion and take unknown amounts of time to find any compromises. However, cultural issues are an unavoidable part of such discussions. This thesis suggests taking a more conscious attitude to explicating them as relevant enablers or hindrances to development. This view seems contradictory to the efficiency logic. Indeed, it might appear that the officials would waste much time on philosophical discussions, but on the other hand, this would also mean that other considerations next to the dominant imperatives like economic growth and efficiency would have better chances of being chosen as criteria for finding solutions to SD challenges.

Change of narrative or vision emerged as a relevant topic on both levels; however, whereas on the civil society level, the perception was that the change of narrative towards SD needs to happen and must be fostered, on the governance level, the change of narrative had already taken place by switching from the more integrated SD approach to the economised perspective at the turn of the decade. One of the main contributions of this thesis is linking the European governance macronarratives that resulted from the case study analysis with globally existing reductionist and holistic development approaches, resulting in two grounded metanarratives of change. As invariables reoccurring in each case, these metanarratives help to grasp the specific features of each development approach in an interrelated manner. By explicating the different metanarratives informing the civil society and governance approaches to SD, this thesis hopes to contribute to increasing the awareness and the ability to recognise and accept the tendencies in the partners, to look beyond the habitual normative frameworks and increase the probability of finding truly innovative solutions.

To address and counterbalance such developments, the normative nature of the SD concept should be explicated and the cultural and worldview-related aspects not be excluded out of convenience. The qualitative half of the human nature should not be discarded from designing the future. When judging the value of a meadow according to efficiency, profitability and quantitative criteria, its integrated ecosystem, the specific composition of species, beauty and serenity have no relevance, as they cannot be measured according to these criteria. It is not argued that such criteria are irrelevant, but that they are too dominant. By considering SD in a wider and more integrative manner by including the qualitative worldview-related aspects, the SD situation could be balanced. An integrative approach and more substantial cross-sectoral dialogue would allow for more innovative solutions, synergy and cooperation, paving the way to faster changes. Thus, a conscious and reflexive inclusion of cultural aspects is argued for, instead of the taboo-like exclusion still taking place on the governance and scientific levels.

Adopting a new narrative was often suggested as a solution for exiting the crises. However, it is not enough as a solution. I believe that a more multi-layered solution is needed involving the slow, but stable “one heart at the time” transformations on the microlevel, active profit and third sectors, and well-negotiated and informed governance regulations with functioning feedback loops. This would include different stakeholders bringing their approaches to the table and negotiating them in an open and reflective manner, seeking win-win solutions. One of the solutions might be developing a new cooperation culture by using ICT solutions for flexible public discussions. With the help of these solutions, it would be possible to foster a new, more horizontal participation culture leading to co-creation. This would be a significant step towards a wider reflexive turn in SD issues. Moving towards

knowledge society could be a joint solution that fits both levels and offers an open arena for negotiations and formation of new societal agreements facilitating cooperation in the future.

So instead of attempting to create a new narrative or a new culture (which are likely to be new forms of existing narratives and cultures), more emphasis should be given to developing the skill of reflexivity which enables seeing beyond the current metanarrative a person follows, understand that the other person follows a different one, and enables them to find common ground and practical solutions to shared problems in a new, solution-oriented way. It is clear that the dominant governance metanarrative has been causing more environmental damage and is in many ways not leading towards a sustainable human civilisation; however, it is not considered realistic to suggest that people should be forced to forsake their belief systems. So, instead of saying that everyone needs to adopt their lives to living according to a new, less harmful and wasteful metanarrative, it is suggested that by developing the reflexive abilities of people through education and lifelong learning, the ability to find practical compromises instead of clashing on the level of abstract values and opinions becomes much more likely. Diversity is one of the keys to resilience and sustainability, both in nature and the human society and cultures. Thus, people need to become more aware and reflexive about their own and other development models to lessen taboos and be more open to solution-oriented practical discussions and cooperation. The criteria followed when making decisions affecting long-term development should be part of an open public debate. It would make sense to open a public discussion on what is considered supportive or detrimental to SD.

Thus, this study also contributes by drawing attention to the benefits that could arise from broadening the scope of accepted knowledge. Generating qualitative data through interviews and fieldwork to analyse the thus far little studied civil society actors expands the range of available information on civil society approaches to sustainable development. Relating that with the governance rhetoric and practices offers a new perspective. Hopefully this data can inform further research that would continue to contribute to the body of knowledge on sustainable development in Europe. It is argued that the qualitative analysis of micro-level processes, which might be described as studying personal and communal sustainability processes, is presently not considered relevant enough. SD has been a macro-level concept since the outset, also applying to mesolevel processes and actors. However, the micro-level has mostly been left out of the SD discussions or tackled in a highly limited way in terms of green consumerism. Whereas the governmental level focuses more on the meso- and macrolevels, the civil society approach centres on microlevel processes. It is suggested that the microlevel changes can contribute significantly to the overall transition, if upscaled in cooperation with the governance level. This research thus argues for more acceptance and emphasis on local solutions, balancing globalisation with localisation. Facilitating localisation would help to bring SD closer to people, make it more understandable and practical, and thus more relevant and impactful. It is also easier to restore, balance and create cultural norms locally.

Among the main tools for achieving more reflexivity, deepening intra- and interpersonal skills are education and lifelong learning. These help to foster the ability to see beyond personal views, consider these topics in a broader context and gain innovative insights. Without including cultural considerations, progress has remained limited. As several governance representatives admitted in expert interviews: the SD concept has remained too abstract for the people. This is mainly due to having discarded many value-related aspects from the SD policy documents which often motivate people. By allowing for the option of including cultural aspects in an explicit manner, the current gaps in understanding between different stakeholder groups could be addressed and bridged more easily. Including these considerations into an explicit and open debate would help to bring more reflexivity and rational analysis to the SD discussions and provide a more systematic view on how to tackle the problems which have been partly created by the compartmentalised and specialised vision of the

prevalent power structures in the North. This research argues for the relevance of including these aspects to support the qualitative development of SD awareness. It might be that the current migrant crisis and danger of terrorism will draw more attention to and help to legitimise the relevance of the intangible cultural aspects. However, by focusing more on building intra- and interpersonal capacity, it would be easier to make changes without outer pressure, leaving the people more creative freedom for co-creating a better future. As revisiting the classic limits to growth study shows, continuing on the current development course means that it will not be possible to avoid bigger calamities. This means that we have to seriously consider how to change the course. To balance the current emphasis on structural and technological macrolevel changes, the relevance of developing the relational, qualitative and microlevel changes is considered important as it could help to accelerate change. This requires openness for reconsidering the values and norms shaping our vision of the future and development aims. The reflexive turn in sciences should broaden to a reflexive turn in the society. This is where the knowledge society vision would lead us.

**Relevance of inter- and intrapersonal literacy.** There is an illusion of already knowing what sustainable development is and consequently not taking the time to understand systematically what drives and motivates different stakeholders. However, for different groups, the same words have different content, as the analysis of sustainable development as the central concept of this study has clearly shown. Sustainable development is an ongoing process, not a fixed state. Making progress towards sustainable development requires overcoming ignorance and resistance and accepting the plurality of meanings and aims behind this concept. The complex interrelated systems and human affairs are too poorly understood and represented in the dominant reductionist development approach. Major advances have taken place in the way we understand natural systems, and in the development of sustainable technologies, pushing the boundaries of science and technology. However, the advances in understanding humans are much less significant, and both fields of personal and cultural sustainability are only just emerging. This research aims to contribute to outlining the gaps caused by the excessive focus on the macrolevel and tangible, quantifiable aspects.

Research participants tended to be unaware of living in the bounds of a certain metanarrative with predefined limits of normality, of what is good and what is bad, what is desirable and what should be avoided. Awareness of individuals, as well as groups, is mostly compartmental – in certain aspects, like work, people rather tend to be rational; while in other aspects, like private life, often emotional. Becoming aware of the metanarrative one follows and developing new intra- and interpersonal skills can help to facilitate broadening the perspectives to transcend the limits of only one truth and discover new options. Becoming more aware and broadening the field of conscious actions to more aspects of life is suggested as the key facilitating not only the micro-level (personal), but also the mesolevel (community level) and the macro-level change processes. This requires openness for working towards translating, negotiating and making connections between people, groups and the way they understand the worlds they inhabit. Systematically developing such intra- and interpersonal skills that support raising reflexive, communication and cooperation capacity could help to move beyond worldview-based confrontations towards creating a discussion space on what kind of future we want, helping to develop win-win solutions with broader ownership. This requires will on both sides and understanding of the need for more joint efforts to stop destroying and polluting the world that we live in, preserve as much as possible and pass it on to the next generations in as good condition as we can. I believe that the narrative approach can be helpful in facilitating mutual understanding, communication and envisioning of a better future for as many as possible.

The answer to the question if it is realistic to bring contemporary democratic, capitalist systems in line with the requirements posed by the sustainable development agenda depends on which sustainable living agenda we are talking about. It is easier to align the current system with the

efficiency-oriented weak sustainability agenda, while the civil society´s sufficiency-oriented strong sustainability agenda would require a systems change. If changes towards more sustainable ways of life were done in a compulsory way, it would be ecofascism, but if it is done in the spirit of knowledge society, where interests and needs of all stakeholders are openly negotiated before decisions are made, and participation is not a facade but a substantial societal dialogue process aimed at reaching new societal agreements, the change could generate innovative solutions with strong ownership. For a good result, both small-scale and cultural as well as large-scale and structural changes need to take place in parallel, reinforcing each other and offering different people access points to join in on the Great Turning/Great Transformation.

#### 5.3.1.1. Answers to the research questions

The research questions answered in the third, fourth and fifth chapters are summed up below. As pointed out in Chapter 1, these questions were neither purely practical nor purely conceptual in nature and can thus be classified as applied research questions helping to find out what needs to be known before practical problems can be solved, indicating possible steps towards solutions (Turabian 2007).

**How is the SD concept understood by the GOV and CS actors in the sample?**

Research participants on neither level hardly took any time for reflecting on or discussing with each other what they mean under SD. Rather, they presumed that there is a consensus, and focused on planning steps for moving towards sustainable development as they understood it. Analysis showed that even with minimal reflection and discussion, the actors in specific groups indeed tended to share the narrative on what causes unsustainability and how to move towards more sustainable development. Analysis also showed that the approaches differed rather according to belonging to the civil society or governance sector than along socio-cultural, economic or ecological circumstances across the Northeast-Southwest axis through Europe.

Although the "sustainability" and "sustainable development" concepts were often used as synonyms by research participants, and the former often served as an abbreviation of the latter, the language use hinted at ideological differences behind the choice of concept. Regardless of how I posed the question, the civil society groups tended to speak more often about sustainability, whereas the governance actors preferred to use the sustainable development concept. A possible explanation for this difference could be that the SD concept has a stronger link to economic growth than the sustainability concept. Similar observations and conclusions were also made by Robinson (2004: 370) and Dessein (2015: 22-23), who suggested that the SD concept seems less radical and thus more attractive for more conservative groups like governments and big organisations, for whom development is still a synonym to economic growth, which might at times contradict with sustainability goals. Used alone, "sustainability" does not necessarily presuppose economic growth, and is also compatible with de-growth or no growth agendas, or having social equity and justice instead of economic prosperity as its goal. Although interesting, these hints were not conclusive, because there were also opposite examples. For example, the "sustainable development" concept is missing from the overarching European development strategy Europe 2020. On the other hand, the "sustainability" concept is used over thirty times, mostly as "sustainable growth". It makes a significant difference: maintaining a balanced ecological, social and economic development or maintaining economic growth.

The case study analysis resulted in core themes and categories capturing the essence of what sustainable development is and telling a story about what is wrong and how to turn towards more sustainable development. Continuing analysis and theoretical saturation of the case study results led to

two overarching ways of interpreting sustainable development: the efficiency and growth-oriented governance approach, characterised by the weak sustainability stance and reductionist perspective tending towards tackling issues in a specialised manner separately from each other; and the sufficiency and downscaling oriented civil society approach, characterised by the strong sustainability stance and holistic perspective tending towards tackling issues in an interconnected manner. The governance approach was summed up as "economising turn", as a clear change in narrative from a more integrative understanding of sustainable development as equal development of social, ecological and economic development aspects to prioritising economic interests. The civil society core theme, capturing the essence of their shared understanding of what is needed for sustainable development was "reintegrating turn". Here a need for reconnecting with people, places and things we daily use was considered necessary to overcome the illusion of separation and for that, downscaling and relocalising the way of life and recreating community were considered essential.

These core themes and categories show how different the development directions envisioned for achieving sustainable development by CS and GOV levels were. Despite these differences, there were also common traits, for example both levels prioritised reducing waste and wastefulness and education as keys to positive developments. Just the contents of the ideal educational curricula differ across the sectors, with the CS level being more open to experimental and experiential knowledge and skills. For a more detailed analysis, please see Chapters 4 and 5.

**Which solutions for achieving a more sustainable future were seen among the research participants?**

Analysis shows that there were significant differences in what the CS and GOV actors in the sample considered problematic and accordingly, which were their solutions for solving these problems.

Distinct differences and similarities in the form of core themes and concepts, which can be seen in the case study analysis in Chapter 4 (summary in Table 35), gave grounds for articulating two grounded metanarratives of change in Chapter 5.1.

In a nutshell, it can be said that the civil society level considered the disconnection caused by the currently dominating globalised consumer society the main problem. Accordingly, it facilitates wastefulness, lacks a positive vision and makes the consequences of our choices abstract and anonymous. "Reconnecting" emerged as the core solution across the civil society cases, capturing the positive vision, central activities and direction of change towards SD. On the personal level, it represented the need to reconnect to oneself, the surrounding reality and take responsibility for our actions. On the social level, it signified the need to break free from social isolation and restore connection to other people and learn how to live as a member of a community on the long-term. On the socio-economical and ecological level, it meant the need to change the wasteful globalised production and consumption systems that perpetuate inequality and destroy nature, achieved by relocalising and downscaling the systems to the level that they become regional, transparent and less wasteful again. On the worldview level, it signified the desire to overcome what was perceived as the worldview of separation or disconnection culture – to rediscover human identity as an interconnected member of the web of life and act with corresponding respect and responsibility.

The main problem for the governance level was how to ensure continuing competitivness on the global scale while sustaining economic growth, minimising resource use and protecting climate. The economising turn emerged as the key solution, further specified by green growth, social cohesion, transition from the integrated SD approach to economy-driven developmental approach, sustainable consumption and production, as well as fostering competitiveness, innovation and globalisation. This could be achieved by greening the production and consumption processes and decoupling economic

growth from resource use to address climate change issues, while counteracing social exclusion to ensure long-term competitivness of Europe.

One of the main differences between the levels was the implicit or explicit inclusion of culture as a factor hindering or facilitating sustainable development. The seeming exclusion of culture supports perpetuating the current development course and does not support an open dialogue on values and ethics of development choices.

In the face of the continuing and deepening ecological destruction, social suffering and wastefulness it seems unreasonable to side-line worldview-related qualitative issues as too complex, time-consuming, incalculable or uncomfortable. It seems irrational to protect the current value-orientations and belief systems under the banner of protecting democratic freedom while continuing in a system that fails to admit its serious deficits and provide reliable alternatives. The weak sustainable hope of substituting natural capital with man-made capital seems much too vague and uncertain to rely on. The strong-weak sustainability distinction opens a deeper cultural difference between the civil society and governance approaches to sustainable development: does nature have intrinsic value or does it gain its value from relevance to humans? Can natural capital be substituted by man-made capital or not? The answers to these questions lead us to the way human role and relationship with the world is understood. Whereas the civil society actors tended to consider humans as participants in the web of life which is a self-organising system that humans do not (yet) know much about and do not control; the governance level tended to see humans as captains or pilots of the Spaceship Earth, able to fix the system when needed with their scientific and technological inventiveness. Consequently, the solutions of the levels differ: the CS level focused more on cultural and inner change, reviving community and considering a systems change necessary, while the governance level focused more on structural changes, technological innovations and adjustments to the system.

**What is the situation in the European Union – has SD really been mainstreamed?**

The answer to this question depends on the viewpoint. From the civil society strong sustainability prospective the answer is no, whereas from the governance weak sustainability perspective, the answer is yes. The claim that sustainable development is already mainstreamed in Europe leaves many internal inconsistencies without sufficient attention, and calls for further research. Formally, looking at how many documents have been created by the EU and member states concerning sustainable development, this claim has some ground. However, taking a closer look at the *status quo* beyond the rhetoric, the vast diversity of situations in the union is revealed, as well as the inconvenient truth that sustainability is exceedingly sacrificed on the political level in favour of economic growth and competitiveness.

**Why has the progress of the SD-pioneer EU slowed down considerably since ca. 2009?**

A change towards economising and disintegrating the SD approach has taken place in the EU. The business interests influence the governance priorities very strongly, much more so than the civil society interests. This is facilitated by the shift of development priorities towards economic growth and the fact that the profit sector is using the services of professional lobbyists who help to shape the messages of the businesses in a way that makes them easily graspable. The civil society groups, on the other hand, are too fragmented and lack the resources to orchestrate a more unified presence which would allow their interests to be presented more professionally and be accepted as equally relevant input on the governance level. Furthermore, their arguments and focus are often more qualitative in nature, which does not correspond to the quantified governance approach.

The reasons for this change include the economic crisis, pressure from economic interest groups and internal resistance to having two overarching development strategies for the EU (the

Lisbon strategy and the EU SDS). These factors cumulated in the second half of the 2000nds, which led to the Lisbon strategy being prolonged as the Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs. The EU SDS was not renewed and instead it was claimed that the EU SDS has been mainstreamed into the Europe 2020 strategy.

The governance approach to SD could be divided to three rough phases since the original Rio conference: preparation and negotiation phase from 1992 to 2000, the European SD decade of creating and implementing SD strategies from 2001 to 2009, and the economising turn of externalising and disintegrating the SD approach to ensure green economic growth from 2010 to 2020. So the year 2009 coincided with the end of the EU sustainable development decade, when interest in SD-issues experienced a low point.

The economising turn means that the prior integrative SD approach has been reserved mainly for international cooperation and that the scope of SD issues taken over from the last EU SDS was narrowed to fit the new agenda. It can be said that the development focus has changed and that short-term goals have been prioritised. However, the UN continued to be an active driver of SD processes with the Rio+20 conference in 2012 and the following preparations of the Agenda 2030 and the 17 SDGs, and the EU along with its member states is actively participating in these processes. Thus, it is premature and inaccurate to say that the progress has slowed down considerably, despite the narrowing scope. For example, in relation to climate protection the EU has remained active.

**Do the SD-approaches depend more on the local/national context or belonging to a stakeholder group?**

In the context of this sample, the SD approaches depended more on belonging to the governance or civil society sector than on national or regional context. However, considering the success of the SD implementation, a clear difference was apparent on the governance level between Northern and Southern Europe. As a high-ranking EU SD officer summarised:

> "*...there are more innovative regions such as Northern Europe as well as weaker, such as Southern Europe. Interestingly, the borderline between the "pioneers" and "laggards" seems to run not along the recent political division to Eastern and Western Europe, but rather along the culturally conditioned axis of Northern and Southern Europe. Reasons for the considerable differences between Estonia, Germany and Portugal in terms of availability of information about SD principles, managing the strategies and actions depend on their respective societal cultures of openness and the weakness or strength of the civil society*" (CE, female, 40s).

Despite these differences in will and capacity to address sustainability issues across the governance actors in the sample, the core values and understanding of the right direction of development was shared. The same applied to the civil society initiatives: although the circumstances and partly also motivations were different across initiatives, the essential understanding of the development direction leading towards sustainable development was shared.

**Which are the main reasons hindering cross-sectoral cooperation in the sustainability scene?**

Despite being frequently highlighted in rhetoric as a *sine qua non*, cooperation has not been as stable and productive as wished for. According to the results of this analysis, the core reason for that lays in ideological differences and lacking cross-sectoral communication and cooperation skills and capacity.

The main reason for the fragmented cooperation in the sustainability scene hindering closer cross-sectoral cooperation is the principal difference in the desired direction of change expressed in the two metanarratives of change (see subchapter 5.1). Further obstacles hindering cross-sectoral cooperation in the European SD-scene rise for example from ignorance (e.g. believing that what is written down, is also realised), misunderstanding, intransparency, prejudices, fear of extra work or

losing one's identity, from unwillingness to exit the comfort zone, or from low capacity. As the analysis using the "ladder of participation" in subchapter 5.2.2.8. showed, the expectation horizons of the sectors in terms of which participation they are open for differs across sectors. The civil society level tends to look for more intensive collaboration, whereas the governance level tends to prefer less intensity.

The ideological differences are also expressed in the significantly different understanding of what a better way of life means. In the governance view, this is directly related to economic welfare. The civil society view is considerably broader in this respect, and additionally encompasses social, ecological and cultural elements.

The GT resulting from the analysis of this thesis suggests the relevance of raising awareness of different metanarratives as a way for paving ways for smarter and more consistent cross-sectoral cooperation. Raising awareness about the diversity of approaches and interpretations of SD can help in overcoming ignorance and prejudice which are currently relevant roadblocks. Understanding the differences between the groups better can stimulate dialogue and more symmetric communication to find common ground and move towards a better cooperation among stakeholders interested in bringing about a change in these issues. Increased reflexivity, improved ways of communication, learning and partnership are needed across sectors to achieve any substantial changes towards SD. I argue that there is a lack of consistency in the seriously intended and wisely implemented cross-sectoral SD participation across the EU. In spite of the seeming consensus among most stakeholders that significant changes are necessary to achieve sustainable development and ensure a liveable tomorrow for our descendants, the gap between words and actions aimed at creating a better tomorrow still persists, and has in some cases widened. In rhetoric, the role given to the civil society and active citizens in bringing about a change towards sustainability has been increasing since the Rio conference in 1992. However, only limited progress has been made by 2015 in actions: the top-to-bottom approach of the governance institutions is still dominant; and although bottom-up participation is included and the decision-making processes have been made more transparent to some extent, participation is mostly channelled into too specific and limited formats, such as public consultations. Even if participation is enabled in policy-making at the EU level in certain ways, it sometimes proves a hindrance rather than help for the policy-makers, and underlines that effective participation is a skill that still needs to be learned by both the civil society organisations and the governance institutions. On the other side, the civil society groups, such as the case study networks, also need to take a more professional attitude to reach more people and to be taken more seriously as partners by the governance sector. Overcoming fears is an issue on both sides that would benefit all involved parties.

**What is the role of culture in facilitating or hindering transition towards SD?**

It is impossible for humans to act outside of culture as it frames our lives and decisions. So culture cannot be excluded from human activities, especially development plans – it can simply be included implicitly or explicitly, automatically or intentionally. The governance level tended to side-line cultural issues beyond material culture, e.g. in the context of preserving cultural heritage. This meant that worldview-related issues were rarely included and mostly not opened for discussion.

When the underlying value-orientations, norms and practices are not openly discussed, they are taken for granted, preserved and perpetuated. If the stance is taken that there is no room for considering cultural aspects, then it essentially means that the implicitly included normative positions and value orientations are not open for discussion. It also helps to reduce questioning of the ability of the current development direction to foster sustainable development. Thus, it can be argued that under the current economised development approach, economic development has gained priority status in Europe and the reluctance to openly include cultural aspects helps to protect the system from being too

intensively questioned and changed. Reasons for excluding value-related aspects from development considerations had to do with believing that it would be too difficult and time-consuming to reach normative agreements on cultural issues. Another central argument was that this would compromise democratic rights and freedom of choice. The private sphere should not be regulated, and as long as people do not harm themselves or others, they should have the right to do as they choose. This is a relevant point, but it oversees the fact that also the currently dominating development approach is based on normative values and beliefs, which are already influencing the freedom of choice and causing serious long-term harm. The harmful results are many on various levels, ranging from perpetuating intragenerational inequity and tolerating the continuing destruction of ecosystems and extinction of species to deeply inadequate efforts to deal with climate change issues. Even from the weak sustainability position the agreements underlying the capitalist consumer society are harming and disadvantaging many people from present and future generations as well as other living beings and the life-supporting systems that we all depend on. Considering the continuing ecological destruction, social suffering and wastefulness it seems irresponsible that the governance level sidelines worldview-related qualitative issues. Furthermore, it seems irrational to protect the current value-orientations and belief systems under the banner of protecting democratic freedom while continuing in a system that fails to admit its serious deficits and seek ways to ensure reliable long-term sustainability.

The civil society nested SD model (Figure 13) includes the cultural aspect. It depicts the overall embeddedness of economy and society in culture and nature; with the economy dependent on society, which in turn is dependent on culture, which depends on and is embedded in nature. Culture is understood on this level as a broad system of values and practices informing the thoughts, feelings, choices, behaviour and practices of people who share it. As such, it has a significant impact on making human development sustainable or unsustainable. In the governance rhetoric and practice, culture is rarely included as a priority (the Estonian and German NSDS are exceptions) or a prerequisite of SD. The fact that cultural and worldview-related aspects are not explicitly included in the governance rhetoric and action plans has to do with their quantitative focus. Consequently, culture is featured in SD documents and rhetoric more often in the form of agri-, aqua-, or silviculture or in the context of high culture, cultural heritage and tourism, or cultural diversity in relation to indigenous groups and migrants. Culture is also mentioned in relation to speaking of the need for a new organisational and political culture, or in the context of consumption and predicting ways of regulating consumer behaviour. For a more detailed discussion, see subchapters 5.1.4. and 5.2.2.4.

Culture plays a central role in facilitating or hindering developments. It is also the measure of what is considered sustainable and what not. For example, economic globalisation can be considered unsustainable, as it robs transparency from processes, and the focus on efficiency means that ethical considerations don't have much weight, resulting in processes that perpetuate social inequality and harm the environment. From another perspective, economic globalisation is the way to remain competitive and be able to ensure the continuing and growing wellbeing of certain people. Even if it is at the cost of other people in the global South or the interest of local biological diversity (5.2.2.3.).

**Which sustainability in the interests of whom do the different SD approaches generate?**

The case study analysis in Chapter 4 and the theoretical discussion in Chapter 5 showed clearly that the governance groups in the sample tended towards economised perception of sustainable development prioritising greened economic growth. Due to the seeming exclusion of intangible and qualitative cultural aspects, the tendency to tackle problems independently from each other and the belief that man-made capital can substitute for depleted natural resources, it can be described as the efficiency-oriented reductionist weak sustainability approach. The focus tends to be on the quantifiable

macrolevel processes and aspects and a solution for ensuring continuing and growing wellbeing is seen in creating an upscaled, globalised, competitive, and efficient future characterised by the economically driven SD perception fostered by green growth, sustainable consumption and production, investments in education and innovation and job creation to eradicate poverty. Strict hierarchies and specialised expert knowledge are valued, and there is trust that with some adjustments, the existing systems can cope with sustainability problems. As no alternatives to achieving and maintaining economic growth is seen, the influence of the profit sector, able to ensure continuing growth in Europe, seems to have grown in the observed period. Whereas during the European SD decade there were two overarching European strategies, one for SD and one for growth and jobs, since 2010 only the latter was prolonged. This process has been described as the economising turn in the governance development narrative. So although it is claimed that the economised development model creates a better future for the entire society, it probably benefits most actors with more financial capital and power. For more details, see subchapters 4.2, 4.3.1. and 5.2.1.2.

The civil society groups in the sample tended towards an integrated sustainable development approach and as they experienced the mainstream approach as disintegrated, they were seeking for ways to reintegrate it. Due to the explicit inclusion of cultural aspects and focus on cultural change, the tendency to tackle issues in an interrelated manner and the belief that natural capital cannot be substituted with other types of capital, this approach can be described as the sufficiency-oriented holistic strong sustainability approach. This approach tends to focus on both qualitative and quantitative micro- and mesolevel (e.g. the level of a city, a bioregion) processes and seeks to complement the governance approach. A solution for ensuring wellbeing was not seen in economic growth, rather no growth or degrowth were suggested. It was believed that reconnecting, relocalising, downscaling and simplifying the way of life serve as keys to a more wellbeing and sustainability. Taking individual and communal responsibility, changing the mind-sets, and creating (or restoring) a positive narrative of the future by being open for cooperation, lifelong learning, sharing of knowledge and resources was also part of the civil society solution. Similarly to the governance level counteracting wastefulness and emphasis on education and lifelong learning were considered essential. The relationship to nature was not instrumental, it is considered to have intrinsic value independent of human interests. In some cases the respect for nature deepened to a sense of awe and sacredness for life. There was also respect for different kinds of knowledge including experimental and experiential knowledge. So in addition to technological and scientific knowledge also the communal and traditional knowledge of indigenous people and the functioning of nature are considered valuable sources of inspiration and innovation. This approach aims to transcend the limits of anthropocentrism by attempting to consider the interests of other living beings, not only humans. So they aim to create a more localised, self-sufficient and sustainable future for everyone, including people, animals, plants and the whole planet. The current situation is perceived as being deeply unjust and unsustainable, so a systems change towards a more interconnected understanding of life and development is considered unavoidable. For more details, see subchapters 4.1., 4.3.2. and 5.2.1.1.

### 5.3.1.2. Seven waves of environmental awareness and sustainability dynamics in Europe

In subchapter 3.1.4. three waves of raising environmental awareness in the 20$^{th}$ century were outlined as a synthesis of several existing periodisations (Mol 1997, Buttel and Taylor 1992, Dodds 2012, Egelston 2012). This periodisation stopped in the mid-1990s, which coincided with the raise of SD-agenda in Europe. The analysis of the later developments allows adding four new periods of sustainable development dynamics in Europe, ranging from 1993 to 2030. Actually the third wave of environmental awareness could be considered the first wave of sustainable development, but for the

sake of continuity the existing periodisation is extended, resulting in seven waves of environmental awareness and sustainability dynamics in Europe.

**First wave: the first half of the 20th century. Protecting nature**: the environmental concern focused mainly on conservation and stopping the degradation of nature. The focus was on ecological and technological impacts of human development on the environment. The concerns were expressed in creation of the first nature reserves and semi-protected areas.

**Second wave: the 1970s until 1986. Political awareness**: the core demand was the reorganisation of the social order as a *conditio sine qua non* for creating an ecologically sound society. The grassroots level was primarily oppositional to the establishment, expressing itself through protests. The civil society-driven green political parties entered the European political scene. The overall awareness and progress towards integrative development agenda remained marginal on the governance and industry levels. Disasters and oil leaks helped to raise public interest and awareness of the risks, expressed in Ulrich Beck's risk society theory (1986).

**Third wave: 1987 until 1992. Breakthrough years**: the SD concept was coined by the World Commission on Environment and Development, and the first UN Rio summit took place, popularising it. The actual transformations of the institutional systems and industrial society began with a broad international commitment to Agenda 21 in 1992. Civil society movements started the transformation from an oppositional to a cooperative strategy. Social sciences started to pay more attention to studying related issues.

**Fourth wave: 1993 to 2000. Raising relevance of SD agenda:** a significant turn in linking environmental issues with social and economic aspects was observed. In a relatively short time sustainable development became recognized as a pressing planetary concern, which can be characterised as a change of narrative. The limits to growth which were previously often dismissed as panicking or exaggeration became something to be taken seriously. Despite growing rhetoric acceptance, there was a relatively low implementation activity of the SD agenda agreed upon in Rio. The Agenda 21 activities started to bring civil society and governance levels together to contribute to SD, and the first pioneering countries started to prepare their SD strategies and adopt related laws.

**Fifth wave: 2001 to 2009. The European sustainable development decade:** this period was characterised by an intense attention to writing, adopting, reviewing and renewing the EU and national SD strategies. It involved integrating respective steps into procurement and policy-making procedures and working on putting the principles to practice. In line with the ideas agreed upon in Agenda 21, it was suggested that these developments have a participative character, so governments invested in introducing participatory methods and planning procedures to increase public awareness, attention and support. Mixed experiences were made on both sides (e.g. while cooperating on Local Agenda projects). This period was characterised by EU having two overarching strategies running in parallel, one aiming for SD and the other for growth and jobs, which caused some confusions and contradictions. The period ended with the silent (not publicly communicated) decision not to renew the integrated EU SDS.

**Sixth wave: 2010 to 2020. The economising turn**: this period began with adopting the Europe 2020

development strategy for growth and jobs. This meant the EU returning to having only one overarching development strategy. This decision on the EU level had similar consequences also on most member states, where the respective 2020 strategies assumed priority status (even though in Estonia and Germany the SD strategy has not expired). It was communicated on the EU level that SD has been mainstreamed in Europe and the SD agenda has been integrated into the EU 2020 strategy. As many SD aims and goals had not been reached and met, this meant that these issues lost their priority status. Furthermore, research indicates a clear narrowing of the thematic scope was be perceived. This narrowing can also be described as a change of narrative away from the more integrative approach towards economising the development agenda. The integrative SD approach was reserved mainly to the international level; internally issues are tackled again in a more segmented manner. Sustainability is mostly discussed in relation to sustainable green growth. However, the cross-sectoral cooperation involving civil society and governance actors has continued to improve. A game-changer stopping the decline of relevance of the SD issues were the perparations for the UN Rio+20 conference in 2012 and the ensuing preparations for the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-s) as part of Agenda 2030 adopted in 2015.

**Seventh wave: 2020-2030. Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals**: It remains to be seen, what kind of development trends will rule Europe in this coming decade. The last period, starting after the end of the Europe 2020 and respective national strategies, remains a prediction that is based on one development plan that Europe has pledged to – the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-s) running until 2030. This is also the final covered year of several NSDS-s in Europe (e.g. that of Estonia). The 17 SDG-s have described as simply as possibly, so they are likely to help to make the thus far vague SD-agenda better understandable to different societal groups. This could facilitate the situation where the SDGs would not be primarily discussed in Europe in relation to the international context, but seen as a helpful tool for discussing development processes and returning to the more interconnected development approach also on the EU and national scales across Europe.

## 5.3.2. Limitations of this study

The first limitations have to do with the qualitative nature of the chosen methodology. As a qualitative study, this research is not representative in nature and the results cannot be used to describe the whole European sustainable development landscape during the research period. If different countries, civil society groups or experts would have been selected as research participants and informants, the results might have differed to some extent.

Regarding the sample, only two sectors from the broader stakeholder scene in Europe were involved in this research: governance and the civil society sectors. People from the profit sector were included in a limited capacity, but not as representatives of the profit sector, but as members of the civil society networks.

The sample was limited to three countries from different parts of Europe (South-West, Central and North-Eastern Europe), which means that it can provide information about certain developments in these countries, and can draw attention to some tendencies in certain regions in Europe in relation to sustainable development approaches and practices, but it cannot offer a basis for making statements about the whole Europe.

A further limitation is that only such civil society initiatives and networks that were aware of and interested in addressing sustainability issues were included in the sample. There are many initiatives and networks that are not aware or interested in the SD issues and challenges or are sceptical about the situation – such groups were not included in the sample.

Another limitation is that many relevant aspects found and highlighted in the analytical Chapter 3 or the case study analysis in Chapter 4 could no be pursued further. This was unavoidable as the research focused on the worldview related issues, which emerged as the reason for the differences between the civil society and governance approaches and the analysis in Chapter 5 focused already largely on the more abstract level. Hopefully the conceptual analysis of the micro, meso- and macronarratives in Chapter 4 can serve as a resource for further research and analysis.

The narratives based on conceptual analysis presented in Chapter 4 capture the characteristic attitudes and tendencies of research participants in the sample. However, they characterise developments on the civil society and governance levels in Europe in a certain period of time.

Contextualising the marconarratives in extant literature to reach theoretical saturation enabled to identify the relations of the civil society and governance approaches to development to reductionist and holistic metanarratives of change. The resulting "Economising turn" and "Reintegrating turn" narratives help to relate the local developments and tendencies with international deveöopments. It is not suggested that the two metanarratives outlined in this study are the only existing metanarratives. They can be helpful for understanding certain groups of people by explicating certain patterns and tendencies, but it is not claimed that they apply to everybody representing the civil society or governance level. Furthermore, as the example of the interviewed EU expert clearly showed, people can represent different narratives in different roles in their lives.

### 5.3.3. Reflections

Anthony Giddens has suggested that the knowledge that social sciences seek is knowledge about how people create the worlds in which they live through reflexive awareness (Smith 2005: 6). As argued in 5.2.2., I disagree with this suggestion, as it would significantly limit the scope of research as in our late- or postmodern societies being reflexive is by far not so common as Giddens seems to hope. Based on data collected for this study and further research experience I suggest that often people do not create their world through reflexive awareness, but through reactive, automatic impulses. This is why narratives play such a big role in human lives, helping people to learn and adjust to the norms and values of the culture(s) they grow up and live in. As this research showed, even the causes that motivate people to action, such as the need to contribute to change towards more sustainable development are often followed without much reflection, based largely on shared beliefs and values that can be traced back to metanarratives of change. Reflexivity has many different degrees. The question is how deeply does an individual, a group or a society at large engage in reflexive practices to be able to stop following the automatic patterns of thought and action and intentionally and consciously choose how to create the future. And what is needed to support such processes on different levels? This research attempted to provide some tentative answers to these questions.

Apart from an activist, a researcher, especially a qualitative researcher has an obligation to be self-reflective. Contrary to the modernist ideal of scientific detachment, the constant comparative method and its constructivist version in particular implies a close relationship between the researcher and the research data and suggests that any theoretical rendering offers an *"interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it"* (Charmaz 2006: 10). Rooted in pragmatism and relativist epistemology, this approach assumes that both data as well as theories are constructed by the researcher through interactions with people, places, and research perspectives (Allen 2010: 1612). So, instead of looking for the truth, I engaged in studying multiple realities and multiple perspectives on these realities. As the data and theory are coloured by the researcher's perspectives, the researcher's experience and views in the research process are shortly explicated and discussed in this section. As the psychologist Jill Morawski summed it up: all researchers are engaged in reflexive practices,

constructing reports about objects that are based on observations, which are influenced by the already pre-existing understanding of these objects (Smith 2005: 7).

Having experienced two basically different worldview systems and the transition between them paved my way to such research. Growing up in Estonia, which was then still a part of the Soviet Union under the communist regime, and receiving my education and first work experiences in the independent, newly capitalist Estonia and later in Germany, which had also gone through a similar transition, sensitised me to socio-cultural transitions and research. Seeing how whole worldviews including beliefs, value systems and practices can rapidly change and how what was previously held to be true and valuable can quickly become false and worthless, was a powerful experience. This personal experience of the relative nature of competing visions of good life and a better future shaped my research interest in socio-cultural transformations.

I started my academic path with studying utopias as a mechanism of cultural dynamic in myths and literature for my bachelor's degree and moved to empirically studying attempts to realise utopian visions in real life with the help of empirical research for my master's degree. As the latter research took place in the Lilleoru ecovillage, a member of the Global Ecovillage Network, the master research project was also the introduction into sustainability studies for me. Linking the current research with my previous experience, it can be argued that in a way sustainable development may be seen as a utopia – a never-ending and ever-changing aspiration towards a better, more just and viable world or a way of living. On the way towards this ideal, people create positive and negative changes and innovations, which we call development. Whether this development is sustainable depends on the perspective – sustainable for whom and for what? In this context the words of Oscar Wilde who described the intrinsically human longing for improvement came to life for me:

> *"A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of utopia"* (Wilde 1891).

So informed by sociology, political studies, anthropology, culture studies and semiotics, this doctoral research project set out to investigate the attempts of international and national governance and civil society initiatives to bring about a change in the currently unsustainable societal patterns and move towards a better and more sustainable development. This book is a roadmap of this study of the rhetoric and practices of sustainable development of the selected case study actors, tracing how the highly political concept of SD with very diverse interpretations and strong potential for creating confusion and conflict has been understood and practised by different societal sectors in current Europe.

The chosen research approach can be described as qualitative, social constructivist and transdisciplinary in nature. The research process was qualitative and dialogue-like in nature, doing justice to the definition of transdisciplinarity by Uwe Schneidewind: research that accompanies and catalyses the transformation processes actively to understand them better (Schneidewind 2014: 2). Engaging in conversations beyond interview questionnaires and explaining the aim of this research already provided new information and impulses to research participants. The most direct transdisciplinary co-creative result of this research process was that my interest in studying the LDI movement in Germany and consent to act as a contact person for a couple of months helped to catalyse the movement in Germany which ignited different processes[41]. The most interesting results could be observed in Karlsruhe where the visits to the deputy mayor´s office, newspaper interviews and TV talks helped to raise awareness about the gaps in the cooperation between the citizens and the

[41] I made clear from the beginning to all participants that I am a researcher and introduced them the aims of this research. Once another contact person was found, I retreated to an observing and participating role.

municipality and led to establishing the BASK movement in Karlsruhe, which then assumed the mediator role between proactive citizens and the local municipality to counteract waste and wastefulness. Without my active participation it would have been possible that a German group would not have formed and even if it had, it would have possibly been much more difficult to understand this process.

Learning to orientate in the broad and complex sustainable development scene in Europe was a rewarding part of the research process. From the outset, my research interest was to explore how the SD concept is understood and operationalised by the civil society and governance actors. The plurality of meanings that SD encompasses and which are often overlooked on the field made this a fascinating research topic for me. The empirical study of the actors in the sample was fascinating as a form of exploring anthroposemiosis: what is considered sustainable or unsustainable by specifc groups, which are the solutions to move towards more sustainable development and which sustainability to whom are they creating with their actions. However, in the course of the research it became clear to me that the weak sustainability approach of the currently dominating development path is not sufficient to ensure long-term sustainability. Cultural aspects emerged as the central differentiating factors between the civil society and governance approaches to SD. It also became clear how relevant the role of lacking intrapersonal and interpersonal skills and literacy is in keeping apart people representing different narratives, obstructing finding common ground and using the benefit of different perspectives to generate win-wins solutions. The working definition of SD was created in subchapter 5.1.5. to mark my position as a researcher before articulating the GT in subchapter 5.2.

**Reflection on the grounded theory research experience**

On the whole the grounded theory method proved suitable for studying the dynamic, diverse and previously little studied SD scene across governance and civil society sectors in Europe. However, it also posed specific problems, which were overwhelming at times. Below some of the key experiences made along the way are discussed.

Overall I experienced a high level of openness and willingness to cooperate from the research participants, as most of them were interested in sharing their concerns, visions and solutions. The systematic, iterative and comparative nature of GT research process including fieldwork, informal conversations and more formal interviews, as well as analysis of texts and documents allowed to yield a great richness of information that facilitated discovering implicit patterns and meanings. The intensive iterative interaction with collected data was highly demanding, but also satisfying. The method helped to trace different meanings behind the concepts that seemed to enjoy undisputed support (the best example is the sustainable development concept itself), the reasons behind unspoken processes (e.g. dropping the EU SDS and consequently changing the course of the whole European development narrative), opinions behind the strategies (e.g. the EU expert saying that strategies are overrated and international meetings inconsequential) and provided valuable insights into the actual processes behind the oversimplifying and generalising rhetoric. As Charmaz predicted, it indeed helped to define relevant processes in their context, specifying the conditions in which they occur, conceptualising their phases, explicating what contributes to their stability or change, and outline their consequences (2011: 361).

Perhaps the biggest advantage of working intensively with primary data was the knowledge that the hypotheses and conclusions made here are not abstract speculations, but grounded in empirical facts. The choice of method supported the wish to be sure that my statements and explanations of the processes of the case study actors are well grounded, explicating and explaining the main concerns of the participants around the development processes in Europe. The intensive GT-based research process helped to explore the way SD is understood and practiced by the chosen stakeholders, finding the

similarities, differences, challenges and potential solutions. It was also inspiring to find interconnections, similarities and differences by analysing the cases across networks and levels to see how they fitted into the bigger picture. Through theoretical sampling also connections to global developments beyond the local context were made and the local stories of change emerged as local versions representing either the holistic or reductionist metanarratives of change.

Despite being intellectually stimulating by enabling creative and systematic research, the method was also constantly perplexing. Using the method for the first time for such a big project proved challenging, but also taught me a great deal, from acquiring new research skills to building up my endurance and tolerance of regression and uncertainty.

The time-consuming, overwhelming, and at times all-absorbing experience made it clear that GT is a demanding research tool. As Fernandez put it: *"...researcher must be persistent and resilient to handle the workload and to tolerate the confusion that arises from uncertainty"* (2005: 58). Having made first-hand experiences, I agree that the heavy demands of GT should not be underestimated:

> *"These demands are real; they should not be underestimated by those contemplating the adoption of the grounded theory method. But when these demands and risks are satisfactorily addressed, grounded theory offers a very strong methodological foundation for researchers wanting to engage in theory-building studies of emerging phenomena"* (Fernandez 2005: 57).

The combination of the broad research scope producing big amounts of data, the laboriousness and time-intensiveness of GT analysis and the long period of uncertainty and openness was not always easy to handle. The lengthy, iterative circles of collecting and analysing data resulted in a lot of "noise and chaos" in trying to make sense of the information (Baturina 2015: 86). Being a novice in GT and trying to theoretically conceptualise what the empirical situations were offering, left me overwhelmed and uncertain time and again. Dealing with large amounts of loose ends over and over before clearer patterns started to emerge required growing in patience and perseverance. So my experience reinforces the experience that GT demands a high degree of devotion and is an "*extremely demanding and challenging research strategy"* (Baturina 2015: 88). The combination of the open and uncertain nature of the GT research process, generating data by doing fieldwork, making interviews and conducting document analysis in seemingly endless iterative rounds made the process more challenging and time-consuming than is usual for a doctoral thesis. The research account was rewritten and shortened several times due to the theory formulation process, but also for the sake of readability, which added to the lengthiness of the process. Deciding which insights to leave out was at times hard to do, as they all had relevance to the issue at hand.

Indeed, on several occasions I regretted having started such a big project using GT. Having chosen a different methodology would have possibly made the process less time-intensive and psychologically easier as it would have provided more certainty and control, but the results would have been more preconceived and less grounded.

All in all the research process produced a significant learning effect. As a researcher, it helped me to get used to the openness, complexity and controversy of sustainable development issues and increase my expertise in the field of sustainable development policies and practices in Europe, and as a person, it helped me to learn about my limitations and develop certain abilities like patience, endurance and tolerance of uncertainty.

The decision to use the GT approach shaped the research process much more than I had expected, creating also a number of hurdles. The choice of methodology produced many misunderstandings along the way, mostly because it was not know well known and understood, and has an unusual circular (iterative) logic. The iterative data collection and analysis circles meant that writing the chapters was not done in a linear manner, finishing one chapter at the time, but rather in a

spiral going back and forth, which made it difficult to meet the expectations on research progress and delivery of finished chapters.

Another example concerns the GT dicta not to do a literature review in the substantive area before the bulk of analysis had been nearly completed to advance the saturation of categories and creation of a more coherent theory (Eisenhardt 1989: 278, Urquhart 2001: 366). So the classical approach of reading literature first with the objective of identifying gaps in relevant theories contrasts with the role that literature plays in grounded theory. To fit academic expectations and be able to show the relevance of this topic I engaged in some basic literature research in the early phases. The acquired insights were simply added to data for further analysis, similarly to how memos were added to the analysis to compare with other incidents in the data, generating concepts from them.

A further example concerns the time factor. Based on the preliminary investigation and test interviews, I had expected the data collection to go more smoothly. However, some largely culturally motivated problems surfaced during data collecting, mostly on the governance level. For example, finding an expert willing and authorised to give an interview from the Portuguese, German and European Union governance systems was surprisingly difficult, lasting up to 6 months. GT proved time-intensive also in the mid-phases between data collection and coding, involving digitalizing, translating, transcribing and systematizing gathered materials. To spare time, avoid getting caught up in details and overcome feeling a need to double check, the classical GT suggests taking notes instead of transcribing interviews. The Charmazian constructivist approach uses transcription, and I also chose this option as it increases the certainty that my analysis is grounded on the views of research participants, not my version of their opinions. In retrospect, I am satisfied with the choice to transcribe the interviews, as it enabled returning to the source as needed, producing a more exact and rich analysis of the cases. However, it also took much more time and caused more conceptual confusion than using the classic approach. A further time factor was that the data was collected in different languages (English, Estonian, and German) according to what was available and more convenient for interview partners. Most material needed to be translated to English. So if ever considering using GT again, I would probably prefer taking notes instead of transcribing and translating all the interviews for the sake of simplicity and saving time.

Consequently, I was repeatedly confronted with academic colleagues claiming that using GT actually means not having a method at all. In the context of GT "anything goes" would mean that data would be collected randomly, coded with preconceived conceptual categories and used to prove a preconceived hypothesis; however, this was not the case. As GT was not used by any peers or more experienced colleagues, doing GT was a lonely path to tread. To avoid methodologically unsound results ensuing from the experience described by Fernandez (2005) as "minus-mentoring" caused by the minority status of the chosen approach, I dedicated extensive time to getting to know the methodology by reading books, articles and online forums. The wish to get the process right accompanied by the obligation to produce a relevant theory or at least relevant key hypotheses (as this is the aim of the method) added extra pressure.

Based on my personal experience that corrobores the experiences of Glaser (1998), Fernandez (2005) and Charmaz (2011), Figure 15 sums up the main challenges GT sets to a researcher.

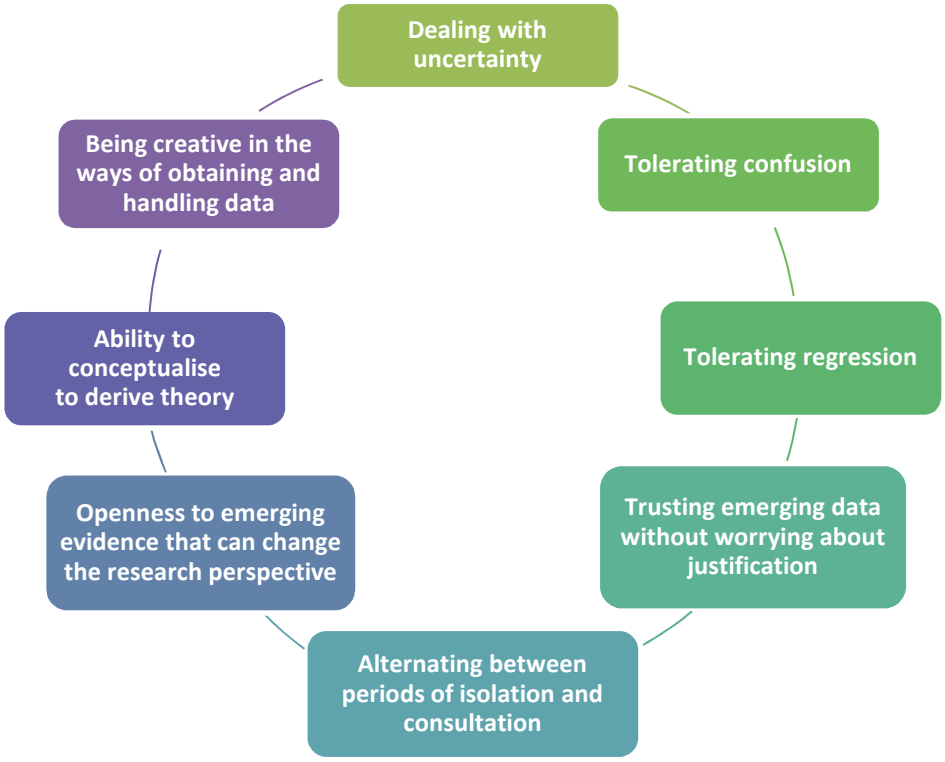



**Figure 15. Key requirements and challenges for a grounded theory researcher.**

### Quality of GT research

The grounded theory method does not aim for the truth, but to conceptualise what is going on by using empirical research and conceptual analysis. So validity in the traditional sense is not an issue, as GT is never right or wrong, it just fits the signs of quality more or less. These signs are relevance, modifiability, fitness and workability. Theory can be said to have good quality if it fits the situation, helps the people involved to make sense of their experiences, and manage the situation at hand better.

It must be said that participants often lacked a clear understanding of what sustainable development means. Furthermore, also their understanding of how the other groups (in this case either the civil society or the governance level) understood and practiced SD was limited to the extent of ignorance and often biased. So the first and foremost contribution of this research is broadening the perspectives of research participants by asking questions about the situation and by providing a detailed and conceptualised analysis about their own SD approach and that of other groups in the sample in a narrative form. Theoretical analysis helped to make sure that the analysis has new insights even to the more reflexive research participants and avoids stating the obvious. The constant comparative method and theoretical sampling enabled to rise to the metalevel, linking the findings to international metanarratives of change. This research account aims to help participants to understand their position in a wider context and also the perspectives of the other groups better, thus lessening the occasional ignorance and oversimplifying prejudices of the "others" and facilitating mutual understanding. Paraphrasing Fernandez (2005: 58), it can be said that GT enabled providing conceptual ideas grounded in patterns, which allows the practitioners to transcend the limits of their own experience and offer conceptual hypotheses that can also be applied to further situations to explain them and predict further developments. Hopefully the suggestions for improving rapport and developing new modes of cooperation between the sectors at the end of 5.2.2 will prove useful to the research participants.

**Ideas for further research**

There were a number of interesting issues that emerged during research that would deserve further investigation. For example, it would be interesting to see if the preparation phase, European SD decade and economising turn observed on the EU level as well as Portuguese, Estonian and German cases is also perceivable in other EU member states. Also, considering that on the governance level these periods were in many ways inspired by the joint actions on the UN level, it would be interesting to see if similar dynamics also took place in some areas beyond Europe. Furthermore, it could be rewarding to revisit the sample in certain intervals (5 or 10 years) to repeat the research and observe the developments in SD rhetoric and practices similarly to a longitudinal study. A follow-up research would enable observing how the actors and their SD perceptions developed in the light of adaptation of the SDGs and what happens after the EU 2020 strategy for growth and jobs (and the respective national strategies) will run out. This would enable to continue updating the periodization. The research design could be complemented by adding quantitative data, which would also facilitate including further stakeholders into the sample and provide grounds for making broader statements and predictions about the situation. It is interesting to observe if the SD concept is able to retain its relevance on the long run or if it will be replaced by further, newer development models and concepts. As the UN-carried SDGs are both global and local development aims up to 2030, there is a possibility that the SD concept again becomes more relevant on the local level.

Another significant change after the initial EU decade of SD is the continuing rise to prominence of the climate change thematic. Similarly to the broader SD topic, in terms of climate change a broad participation is also required to make the needed changes. So it would be relevant to see if the suggestions for improving rapport as well as the understanding of different metanarratives influencing the choices and actions resulting from this research could contribute to improving mutual understanding and cooperation in a more mutually engaging research format (e.g. action research). The situation where there is much talk about needed changes to stop and mitigate climate change, but limited progress and decisive actions shows that not much has changed in society in comparison to the situation during the research period.

Certainly also the interplay between culture and sustainable development and ways to foster open societal discussions on worldview-related issues as central factors in development progress deserves further research and funding. From my perspective especially the impact of developing intra- and interpersonal skills and literacy to support transition processes requires further research.

# SUMMARY

This research used constructivist grounded theory methodology to explore civil society and governance approaches to sustainable development in Europe. The aim was to investigate if there is diversity behind the seeming consensus on sustainable development, identify the ways the chosen stakeholders understood and practiced SD and find out if the bold claim that sustainable development has been mainstreamed in Europe holds true.

The sample consisted of sixteen case studies with Estonia, Germany, Portugal and the European Union representing the governance sector, and the Global Ecovillage Network Europe, the Transition network and the Let's Do It network member initiatives from each participating country, plus the networks themselves representing the civil society sector. The data was collected by doing fieldwork, conducting semi-structured and expert interviews and analysing documents. Data collection, coding and analysis took place in iterative rounds of the constant comparative method.

This study focused on the first 15 years of the 21st century, although for understanding the development of the environmental concern and the sustainability scene, the whole 20th century was included in the broader timeframe.

The book is divided into five chapters followed by three appendices. The first chapter "Introduction" starts with the problem statement and identifies research aims and questions. Next, it provides a short overview of research approach, design and process. It introduces the sample and structure of this book.

The second chapter "Methodology" explains the research design and reasons for choosing the grounded theory methodology. The research process from preparations and entering the field to collecting and analysing data and theory building is described. The criteria for choosing the sample are explained and the selected case study actors are introduced.

The third chapter "Development of the scene" is the first analytic chapter. Based on document and literature analysis it provides an analytical overview of the developments that paved the way for raising environmental awareness and the birth of the sustainable development discourse. This chapter is packed with references and facts to provide vital context for understanding the current developments analysed in the following chapters. The chapter starts with a discussion about the rise of environmental concern in the North and especially in the European Union. Next, the key themes and forerunners of raising environmental awareness are explored. The shift in rhetoric from speaking about "nature" to "environment" and its relevance for human identity and development perspective are discussed. This is followed by outlining the emergence of the contemporary environmental movement and waves of raising environmental concern. Thereafter, the development of the sustainable development scene and especially the meanings of the "sustainability" and "sustainable development" concepts are explored. After that some relevant sustainable development models are discussed, including strong and weak sustainability – a distinction that plays a crucial part in the following discussions. The third chapter finishes with a systematic overview of the development of the selected case study actors in terms of environmental concern and sustainability scene in order to provide relevant context for the following discussions.

The fourth chapter "Case study analysis: governance and civil society approaches to sustainable development in Europe" is based on primary data sources including documents produced by the stakeholders, transcripts of qualitative semi-structured and expert interviews, memos and fieldwork notes (if applicable). Starting with the civil society approach, it explores in sixteen case studies, three summarising analyses of network levels and a summarising analysis of civil society and

governance levels, which are the current problems causing unsustainability according to the research participants and which solutions for moving towards more sustainable development they see and practice. Presented in a narrative form, the core themes and categories of each case along with key properties capture the essence of each approach to sustainable development. The narratives forming from the interrelations between core themes and categories open up the way the role of the individual human being and its relationship to the world is understood. The chapter ends with a summarising analysis of civil society and governance approaches to sustainable development. The core themes capturing the central solution of each level for moving towards sustainable development are "Reconnecting" for the civil society level and "Economisingn turn" for the governance level.

Chapter five "A grounded theory of sustainable development in Europe" begins with a theoretical discussion to reach theoretical saturation. This involves analysing the prelimary research results from the case study analysis further and contextualising the findings in existing research. The topics discussed in this section include the narrative nature of sustainable development, the direction of desired change – upscaling or downscaling, interconnected or fragmented approach to SD, qualitative or quantitiative cultural aspects – and finally (re)considering the concepts of sustainability, sustainable development and culture in the context of the findings thus far. After reaching theoretical saturation, a grounded theory of the sustainable development scene in Europe is outlined. It is relevant to mention that despite the title, it is not believed that this research can capture the whole situation in Europe. As explained in subchapter 5.3.2. under limitations, this theory explains the situation relating to the case study groups in the sample. Finally, the saturated core codes and concepts are used to articulate two metanarratives of change.

The civil society approach merged with the holistic development approach into a metanarrative of change labeled the "Reintegating turn". The main solutions for achieving sustainable development are downscaling (using the sufficiency and no/degrowth approach) and reconneting (re-embedding and relocalising). The holistic perspective entails explicitly including cultural aspects. The strong sustainability stance means that nature is considered to have independent intrinsic value and substituting natural capital with man-made capital is not considered acceptable.

The governance approach to sustainable development merged with the reductionist development approach into the "Economising turn" metanarrative of change. The main solutions for achieving sustainable development were upscaling (using the efficiency and green growth approaches) and disconnecting (disembedding, globalising). Assuming a reductionist perspective includes the tendency to exclude cultural aspects from development discussions. Representing the weak sustainability approach means that nature is seen primarily as a resource for increasing human wellbeing and if natural capital is used up, it is acceptable to substitute it with man-made capital.

The grounded theory outlined in the next subchapter "Key hypothesis of the grounded theory of governance and civil society approaches to sustainable development in Europe" was divided into eight sections. First, the vague and seeming consensus on sustainable development was dismantled, next the distinctive periods of sustainable development dynamics in Europe were outlined and the change of narrative, described as economising turn, accompanied by narrowing of the sustainable development agenda was described. Thereafter the negative consequences of this change of narrative were discussed, most importantly the failure to ensure intra- and intergenerational equity and long-term sustainability. The latter is due to uncertainty of the weak sustainability approach with its vague hope of developing new resources to substitute for the used up natural resources. It is also considered too risky, bearing in mind that there is no information on the impacts of these new resources and all inhabitants of the Earth are the sample for this large-scale real life experiment.

Next, the impacts and reasons for side-lining cultural and ethical worldview-related aspects from the dominant development approach are discussed. The main reasons for not explicitly including

them are twofold: from one hand it is considered too time-consuming and difficult to try to reach agreements on value-related issues (especially on the whole EU level) and from the other hand, such attempts are believed to endanger democracy, as individuals should have the freedom of choice as long as they are not harming themselves or others with that freedom. The main counter-argument is that the currently dominating growth-oriented development approach already includes cultural values and beliefs which have not proven supportive of long-term sustainability. Thus, it seems unreasonable not to open up to questioning them. When there is no openness for reconsidering the underlying values and norms, the current systems are perpetuated with limited changes. It is suggested that the efficiency-oriented weak sustainability approach is not enough to achieve the necessary changes, so a societal discussion for explicitly considering alternatives would be in the long-term best interests of all stakeholders.

Next, the solution offered by a number of research participants as well as researchers, namely creating a new narrative, is considered. Having or developing a positive vision of the future is relevant, but alone it is not enough to bring about necessary changes. Instead, a more multi-layered solution is suggested involving the slow, but stable "one heart at the time" microlevel transformations, active and informed profit and third sectors, and well-negotiated and informed governance regulations with well-functioning feedback loops. This would include different stakeholders bringing their approaches to the table and negotiating them in an open and reflective manner, seeking win-win solutions.

Moving towards knowledge society to reach new societal agreements facilitating future cooperation requires broadening the scope of accepted knowledge about human well-being and development. It also requires building up existing and developing new skills and capacities for intrapersonal and interpersonal literacy. Nowadays, the development of inner and interpersonal literacy depends on the family, school and socio-cultural settings. The main focus of our educational systems is on learning about the world around us, so people tend to lack the knowledge, skills and experience for observing and dealing with their inner processes. This can cause suffering and social isolation that is unsustainable on the personal, but also communal level. Lacking intrapersonal skills and tolerance of diversity can easily lead to difficulties in interpersonal communication, which reduces the chances for successful cooperation. It is suggested that developing easily usable toolkits of intra- and interpersonal methods for different socio-cultural settings and social groups would increase the wellbeing of people. Increasing intrapersonal skills and capacities would enable transcending the limits of metanarratives that tend to narrow our perception of the world. Increased reflexive capacity also facilitates understanding the other partners with different approaches to life and development, thus paving way towards finding mutual ground. Building interpersonal capacity involves becoming aware and intentionally developing methods, approaches and capacities for improving communication and cooperation skills that would open new possibilities for fostering cross-sectoral synergy and finding truly innovative solutions. Another example of the benefits of broadening the scope of accepted knowledge is that when the civil society level manages to consolidate its message and find ways of communicating its practices in an understandable manner, and the governance level opens to considering alternatives that vary from the growth-oriented development narrative, testing and upscaling certain civil society sufficiency-oriented practices with governmental support could be a relevant contribution for the Great Turning/Great Transformation.

As the last three sections tackle the suggested solutions for facilitating the needed changes, they are summed up on Figure 16 to present the key aspects of this grounded theory for understanding the sustainable development situation among the selected civil society and governance actors in Europe.

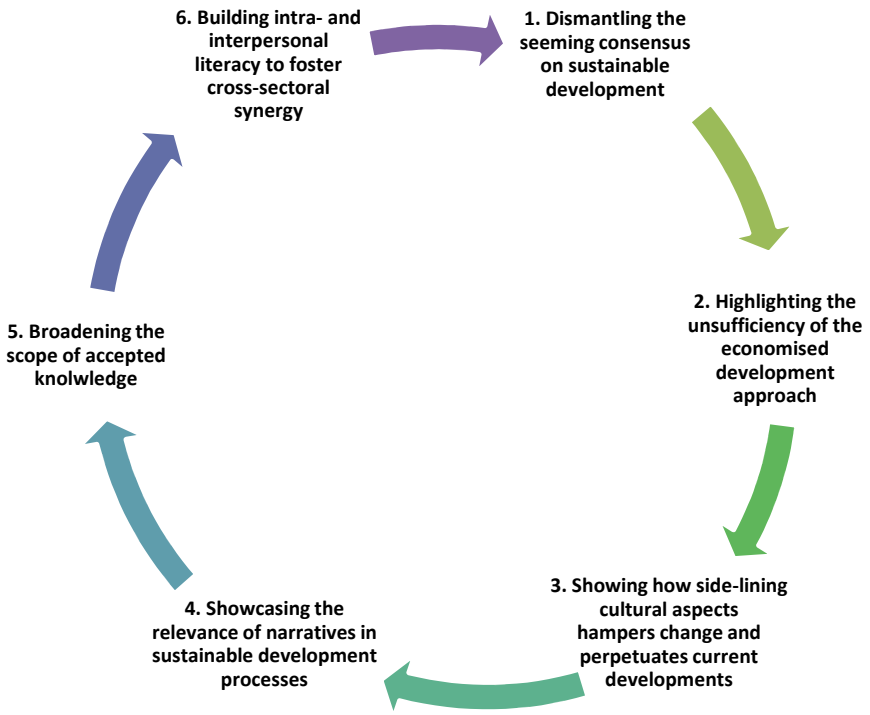



**Figure 16. Grounded theory contributions for understanding the SD situation in Europe.**

The final subchapter "Conclusions: contributions, limitations and reflections" sums up the contributions of this study for understanding the sustainable development processes and scene in Europe, outlines the limitations of this study and reflects on the research process. Here also the answers to research questions answered in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are summed up and seven waves of environmental awareness and sustainability dynamics in Europe are articulated. The latter is the continuation of subchapter "Waves of raising environmental awareness in the 20$^{th}$ century" in Chapter 3. Based on research results, the new periodisation continues from the mid-1990s, where the original periodisation stopped and runs tentatively until the year 2030. The three distinctive periods of SD rhetoric and practices in Europe are: the preparation and prioritising phase ranging from the first Rio conference in 1992 to 2000; the European sustainable development decade ranging from the launch of the EU sustainable development strategy in 2001 to 2009 when the interest in achieving SD goals and writing progress reports was seriously waning; and the economising turn starting in 2010 with the decision to not renew or prolong the EU SDS, but to claim having mainstreamed the SD-agenda into the Europe 2020 strategy of growth and jobs running up to 2020. The last period from 2020-2030, starting after the end of the Europe 2020 and respective national strategies, remains a prediction based on the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-s) running until 2030, a development plan that Europe has pledged to.

The next section "Limitations" discusses the limitations arising from the qualitative nature, the sample and the methodology of this research. Subchapter "Reflections" finishes the last chapter by offering reflections on the role of the researcher and experiences gathered during this research process. Finally some suggestions for further research are made.

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# Appendix I: List of interviews and interviewees

The list provides information about the 38 interview partners and 34 interviews conducted to inform this research. Most interviews were individual conversations; however two were group interviews including three participants which explains the difference in numbers.

For the sake of anonymity, the names of the interview partners are substituted with aliases and the age range and field of activity are presented in a generalised manner. The list gives an overview of the team, country, gender, age and field of activity of the interview partners, as well as the duration of the interview. The order of appearance in the list does not reflect the order of making the interviews, but follows the case study groups by initiative and country. For more details on interviews, see subchapter 2.2.2.

| Nr | Alias | Team | Country | Gender | Age | Field of activity | Duration |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Nr. 1-33 semi-structured interviews with civil society representatives** | | | | | | | |
| **1** | HF | TT | DE | M | 19 | Volunteer activist, student | 1h 5m |
| **2** | KF | TT | DE | F | 20s | Medical student | 2h 15 |
| **3** | AF | TT | DE | M | 50s | Energy consultant | 1h 45m |
| **4** | RP | TT | EE | M | 40s | Lawyer, activist | 1h 5 m |
| **5** | HE | TT | EE | M | 30s | IT businessman, activist | 1h 45m |
| **6** | TE | TT | EE | M | 40s | Activist | 2h 02m |
| **7** | FT | TT | PT | M | 20s | Urban planning student | 1h 25m group interview |
| **8** | LT | TT | PT | M | 20s | Psychology student | |
| **9** | TE | TT | PT | M | 20s | Biology student | |
| **10** | ED | LDI | DE | M | 70s | Retired city planner | 1h 12m |
| **11** | BD | LDI | DE | M | 30s | Unemployed | 1h 53m group interview |
| **12** | KD | LDI | DE | F | 20s | Student activist | |
| **13** | AD | LDI | DE | F | 20s | Student activist | |
| **14** | TL | LDI | Intern. | M | 40s | Politician, entrepreneur, activist | 1h 30m |
| **15** | KL | LDI | EE | F | 30s | Teacher, activist | 1h 30m |
| **16** | ML | LDI | EE | F | 30s | Teacher | 1h |
| **17** | LP | LDI | PT | M | 50s | Activist | 46 min |
| **18** | AP | LDI | PT | M | 50s | Professor | 30 m |
| **19** | EG | GEN | EE | F | 40s | Real estate manager, yoga teacher | 30 m |
| **20** | AG | GEN | EE | F | 30s | Entrepreneur | 1h |
| **21** | TG | GEN | EE | F | 30s | Architect, yoga teacher | 1h 15m |
| **22** | IG | GEN | EE | M | 50s | Adult educator, entrepreneur | 1 h |
| **23** | ME | GEN | Intern. | F | 60s | Educator | 20 m |
| **24** | MR | GEN | PT | F | 50s | Political activist | 2h |
| **25** | NR | GEN | PT | M | 20s | Political activist | 57m |
| **26** | BR | GEN | PT | M | 40s | Political activist | 52m |
| **27** | LR | GEN | PT | F | 50s | Journalist | 1h 15m |
| **28** | KR | GEN | PT | M | 40s | Carpenter | 3h |
| **29** | NS | GEN | DE | F | 40s | Seamstress | 50 m |
| **30** | US | GEN | DE | F | 40s | Secretary | 1h 44m |
| **31** | CS | GEN | DE | F | 50s | Urban planner | 3h |
| **32** | ES | GEN | DE | F | 40s | Psychologist | 1h 11m |
| **33** | SS | GEN | DE | F | 20s | Dancer, fitness instructor | 1h 7m |

| Nr. 34-38 expert interviews with governance representatives | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **34** | OE | GOV | EE | F | 40s | Strategy official, Estonian Ministry of Environment | 59 min |
| **35** | TE | GOV | EE | F | 30s | Strategy official, Government Office | 51 min |
| **36** | RG | GOV | DE | M | 50s | Strategy official, German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety | 40 min |
| **37** | SP | GOV | PT | F | 40s | Strategy official, Portuguese Environment Agency | 49 min |
| **38** | CE | GOV | EU | F | 40s | Strategy official, Directorate-General for the Environment at European Commission | 50 min |
| **SUMMARY, remarks** | | 33 CS, 5 GOV represen-tatives | 13 DE, 11 EE, 11 PT, 3 inter-national | 20 female, 18 male | Aged 19-76 | Over 70% of the interviewees had higher education | Ca 44 hours of trans-cribed material |

# Appendix II: Basic interview questionnaires

The interviews played a relevant part in generating data for this research, providing information and insights into newer developments, unwritten attitudes and practical implementation of the plans outlined in the plans and strategies.

Two basic types of qualitative interviews were made: semi-structured qualitatiative interviews with the civil society representatives and structured expert interviews with the governance representatives. Correspondingly two basic questionnaire-sets were used: a longer and more detailed set for semi-structured civil society interviews and a shorter structured questionnaire for shorter expert interviews. This difference had two main reasons: in the civil society cases much data still needed to be collected, whereas in the governance cases much already existed; and the experts have always limited time.

The questionnaires were modified in the course of research according local contexts, e.g. in Portuguese governance case the partner agreed to answer only six of the fifteen questions.

**Basic semi-structured civil society questionnaire**

1. How long have you been a member?
2. What motivated you to join this movement?
3. Why is this movement relevant?
4. Which people join this movement, is there a common denominator?
5. Has the attitude towards your movement changed over time?
6. What is characteristic to your movement?
7. Which are the core values, ideas and aims?
8. How much cooperation with other societal groups takes place?
9. Is cooperation considered relevant?
10. Has this movement changed your way of looking at the world? If so, how?
11. How did you become interested in sustainable development?
12. What does sustainability and sustainable development mean to you?
13. Is sustainability talked about in your movement?
14. If not, are there alternative expressions used to convey the same meaning/content?
15. Which aspects make up sustainable development?
16. How can development be sustainable?
17. What needs to change?
18. How could that change take place?
19. Which good ecological practices do you use?
20. Which good social practices do you use?
21. Which good economic practices do you use?
22. How is culture related to sustainability?
23. Which cultural practices do you use?
24. Which of these best practices could be introduced to the broader society?
25. What else would you like to add?

**Basic structured expert interview questionnaire**

1. Is achieving sustainable development (SD) important? Why?
2. What is understood under the SD concept on the governance level today?
3. How have the SD-priorities changed over the years (from 1992, 2001)?
4. What are the top SD priorities today? Why are they considered important?
5. Which changes are considered necessary to achieve SD and how can the change be achieved?
6. How is SD coordination organized in your country / in EU?
7. Why hasn't the SD strategy been renewed and there are no reports after 2009 despite plans to do so?
8. Can it be said that the EU/EE/DE/PT 2020 strategy aims to substitute the SDS? If so, to which extent?
9. Does the priority status of green growth at Rio+20 reflect the situation in the EU/ your country? Have alternative priorities been discussed?
10. What's the role of culture in regards to SD? Is it included when SD issues are discussed?
11. How does European historical and socio-economic situation influence the way SD is understood and practiced in different member states – EE, DE, PT?
12. Which are the most relevant internal and external stakehoders influencing the EU SD-related actions?
13. How independent is EU in making SD-related decisions?
14. How much ooperation is there between different actors in SD issues in Europe? For example between the governance level and the 3rd sector (also LA21 groups)
15. How does the governmental level support the spread of sustainability practices?
16. Would you like to add something?

# Appendix III: Core themes and categories of the case study analysis

The table below provides an overview of the case study results based on the analysis in subchapter 3.3. and Chapter 4. The core theme and categories along with their key properties are provided for each case. In addition to case and level synthesis (marked light blue) are provided.

**Table 38. Overview of the core themes, categories and key properties of the case study results.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Civil society cases** | |
| Ecovillage cases | |
| **Lilleoru** | **Conscious awareness as the new paradigm**: awareness, community, education reform |
| **Sieben Linden** | **Simpler relocalised life**: simpler life, community, education |
| **Tamera** | **Establishing peace culture**: new culture, community, research attitude |
| **GEN-E** | **(Re)connecting**: new culture, community, awareness raising / education |
| **Synthesis** | **Reconnecting**: new culture, simpler responsible life, reviving community, educational reform |
| Transition cases | |
| **Paide** | **(Re)localizing to exit the system**: relocalisation, reconnecting, restoring autonomy |
| **Freiburg** | **Taking responsibility for change:** systems change, positive vision, taking responsibility |
| **Telheiras** | **Reviving urban community**: positive vision, reconnecting, taking responsibility |
| **TN** | **Community-led energy decent**: energy descent, resilient communities, cultural change |
| **Synthesis** | **Relocalising for systems change:** positive vision, reviving community, simpler life to restore autonomy |
| LDI cases | |
| **LDI-EE** | **Counteracting waste:** positive vision, LDI spirit, systems change |
| **LDI-DE** | **Counteracting complacency**: making a differene, LDI spirit, changing mindsets |
| **LDI-PT** | **Rethinking waste**: capacity building, LDI spirit, systems change |
| **LDI-N** | **Counteracting waste(fullness)**: changing mindsets, LDI spirit, systems change |
| **Synthesis** | **Counteracting waste(fullness)**: changing mindsets, LDI spirit, systems change |
| **CS level synthesis** | **Reconnecting**: cultural change, reviving community, changing wasteful systems |
| **Governance cases** | |
| **Estonia** | **Between business-as-usual and knowledge society:** knowledge society, ensuring survival, economising turn |
| **Germany** | **Committed co-creation of good life**: continuing commitment, creative vision, social cohesion, climate protection |
| **Portugal** | **Building capacity for green growth:** greening economic growth, social cohesion, building state capacity |
| **EU** | **Change of narrative: externalising and economising SD:** economic growth, climate change, social inclusion, vague responsibility |
| **GOV level synthesis** | **Economising turn**: vague responsibility, green growth, social cohesion, climate protextion, creative vision |

What kind of development is sustainable?
Has sustainable development really been mainstreamed in Europe?
What does culture have to do with different approaches to sustainable development?

This study explores empirically how governance and civil society actors across Europe make sense of the causes of unsustainability and which solutions they practice and suggest for a more sustainable development. As a result of grounded theory analysis of sixteen case studies certain narrative patterns emerged, distinguished by their inclination towards strong or weak sustainability.

Contextualising the case study results in development approaches beyond Europe helped to identifying two metanarratives of change. The „economising turn" and „reintegrating turn" metanarratives capture the essential approaches of its carriers to what sustainable development means and where it should lead us.

These metanarratives represent different perceptions of the role of human being and its relationship to nature and the world at large, highlighting the often neglected relevance of inner and cultural aspects in shaping development processes.

Based on the insights gathered along the way, suggestions for improving cross-sectoral rapport are made and a periodisation of sustainable development dynamics in Europe is suggested.